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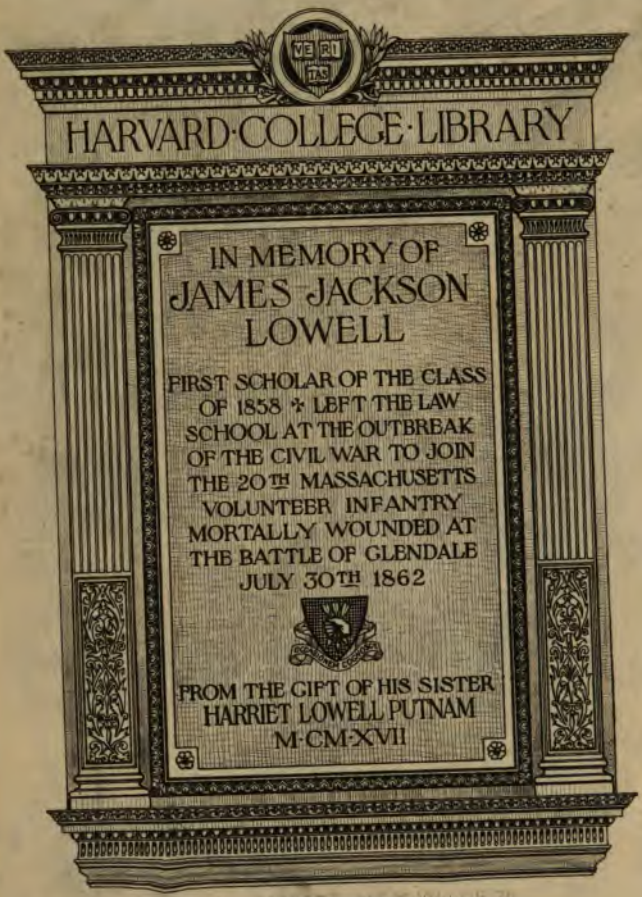
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AUSTRALIAN LIFE

ADAMS.

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AUSTRALIAN LIFE

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By the same Author.

JOHN WEBB'S END.

SONGS OF THE ARMY OF THE NIGHT.

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AUSTRALIAN LIFE

BY

FRANCIS ADAMS

" In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,
And songless bright birds,
Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,
Insatiable summer oppresses
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,
And faint flocks and herds."

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL LD.
1892

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To

FRANK HARRIS:

HOMAGE TO THE STORY-TELLER; TO THE FRIEND

ALL THINGS FRIENDLY.

1892.

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ALONG THE COAST

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THE RED SNAKE.

I.

I WAS walking along George Street, Brisbane, last Monday in the afternoon when I suddenly ran upon my friend Power. Power is a man worth knowing. I suppose no one has been along the Australian coast, from Perth to Port Darwin, more often than he has. Is there a little port-town all round that he has not been in? Is there a river, navigable or unnavigable, that finds its way into Australian seas that he has not floated on? His stock of tales is the largest and best of anyone I know, and he has a sort of humorous kindliness about him, a genuine humanistic tolerance and appreciation, which has made him the friend of all sorts and conditions of men, women, and animals. He has the unctuous pleasure of discovering and understanding every oddity, and the light of this pleasure beams up in his eyes and on his lips and in his whole face as he sits opposite some abnormal piece of humanity in a cosy corner, just as when he pauses from his submarine work in his diver's dress to observe the antics of some eccentric denizen of the deep.

"Look here," he said to me presently, after we had exchanged the usual preliminary small-talk and were pacing along towards the railway station, "look here, old man, I've got a fellow over at my diggings who's about one of the

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funniest fellows in the colony. You must come and see him."

I intimated that I should be very pleased.

"P'raps you know him," said he, "or have heard of him, anyway—Frank Melvil—Melvil of Maidenhair Passage?"

Both the names struck me as familiar, one of them (that of the place) as very familiar, but I could not say in what connection. He saw this by the look on my face and explained.

"You must have passed through Maidenhair Passage on your way up to Port Darwin. It's in the Coral Sea. It's the point where the Great Barrier Reef comes in closest to the coast. If you went through in the day-time you'd be sure to have noticed it. They always get up the passengers to see."

As he spoke, the vision of it rose up before me like a fairy vision. Let me try and recall it again. Early one winter's morning my friend Simmonds, the second officer, came into my cabin and cajoled me out to see what he called Maidenhair Passage. We were steaming along all day at full speed inside the Barrier Reef, anchoring at dusk and starting again at dawn. It was one long dream of balmy loveliness. I used to lie up on the poop in a wicker lounge-chair and doze and read Swinburne's first "Poems and Ballads" and look at the sea and the sky and the coral islands and the land. Those smiling pale-blue tides and heavens, the gentle fall and swell of the inner barriered current and the somnolent sweet winy airs that blew from the brimming Pacific, used to lull my overworked, sick, fevered personality into a state of mild and optimistic rapture which only deepened as the stars came out with their splendid and intense luminosity, Venus circling over the land, the dominant divinity of the galaxies, with a broad silver track on the dark waters. So far one thing alone had seemed wanting. Land and sea looked at one another like two parted lovers. We were too far off to realise the land except by snatches, glimpses of white-

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beached, scrub-covered coral islands, or the everlasting sombre Australian coastal ridges. I came out on deck in my pyjamas, sipping at the cup of tea which the white-clothed Chinese "boy" had brought to me, and mounted on to the poop. Then in a moment I saw the perfection of the dual beauty, marine and terrestrial, their kiss and marriage clasp. We were in a regular passage, land on either side. The coast was to the left, a large coral island to the right; but far, far away over the golden-blue waters the sun rose up sheer from the limitless ocean. A thin, wavy ruffled line of white marked the breakers of the long, hidden, outer reef. All over the island the sunny tree-tops waved in the gentle breeze, the boughs shaking out their twigged leaves as if shivering with voluptuous delight. The clear, pure, white sand of the cove beaches either shone like frosted silver or were cool and dark in the closer shadow. As the island was, so was the mainland, only of a beauty far richer. The beach, all lit up with the sunlight, ran right along, here and there broken by the dark-green mangroves, which grew right down into the crystal and mild water that was softly lipping all within its reach. The trees and dense tropical foliage, twined through with the graceful serpentine creepers, pressed down to the shore. Up towards the narrowest part of the passage, built on piles, was a small wooden house. On the sand below and beside it two or three sail boats lay tilted on their sides. A little group of naked children splashed about or swam in the sunny shallows. Presently I could hear their shouts of laughter and merry calls, and snatches of the songs of the birds flitting from tree to tree came to me as I stood and watched and listened. Simmonds came up the ladder on to the poop and stood beside me.

"That's Frank Melvil's place," he said, pointing to the house, "he's got a little pearl-shell fishery station here."

He told me something more about the man and the place, but I did not regard it. All I remember was standing there watching and listening and thinking of what life would be

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like in this "Eden of bland repose," "where the sea winds sing and the sunlight smiles." I suppose that a poor devil of a journalist, broken down with desperate work and disease, has a right to a little mild dreaming of this sort now and then

"Frank Melvil," said Power, "is one of the old original colonial school, you know. He's not been away from his stations and pearl fisheries up North for over twenty years, and he was quite young when he went up there first. It's the most extraordinary fluke brought him down to Brisbane. He thinks everything is about as bad as it can be."

"What does he mean by that?" I asked.

"Oh, he means that he hates civilisation. He's a prejudice against wearing boots and shirts and collars and——"

"And trousers?"

"Well, I don't know he's got quite that far yet. When I was up at his pearl-shell station he always wore trousers—except when he took it into his head to jump into the sea for a swim."

"And who lives with him up there? Is he married?"

"Frank Melvil?—married? Well, not quite! He doesn't think enough of the common domestic civilised female to get married. Finds her too much trouble; not worth it. No; he lives alone up there with blacks and kanakas. He's South Sea Islanders for his pearl-shell boats, and a mob of blacks to look after the sheep or work about the house. He's a queer fellow. Sits or stands, looking or thinking, and taking no notice of you, for ten or fifteen minutes at a time. His brain works rather slow, too. You mustn't speak quick to him or he won't understand, but he'd never think of telling you so. It's too much trouble. He just goes on his own way and takes no notice. But, if he gets interested in anything, why—as the Yankees say—he's right there."

"What originally took him up North?"

"Well, I'm hanged if I quite know, Acheson. He comes of very good family, I believe. He's an educated gentleman.

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There's no doubt about that. You can't hear him speak and not know it. Some people say he's a baronet if he cared to take the title. There was a Sir Alexander Melvil, a baronet, died six or seven years ago and left no children, and they say he was Frank Melvil's elder brother. I don't know. I hadn't the cheek to ask him when I was up at his place, and if I *had* asked him I don't expect he'd have taken any notice. Very likely he would have told me in his quiet dry way that the sooner I quitted the better. He's a queer fellow. You must come and see him."

"Do you know," I said, "I've a bit of a prejudice against these civilised people who go back into barbarism and loll away life there? I own our civilisation is a frightful failure, of course, but oughtn't we, who see this, to stop and try and make it better, not slither away and live like animals? I've an idea I've heard that he was very cruel to the blacks. Wasn't he a police-magistrate, or something, and was dismissed for going on a massacring party?"

"Well," said Power, "a man needn't be quite a fiend because he'll shoot blacks when his blood's up. I remember when all Cooktown turned out, after the blacks had been spearing fellows out on the runs, and drove a great swarm of them in upon Cape Bedford as you drive game. Cape Bedford's at the end of a little peninsula and ends in a barren rocky bluff. I wouldn't like to say how many blacks kicked out on that bluff when the ring closed in on them. Frank Melvil's a very decent fellow, take him all round, and kind-hearted too, and wouldn't hurt a fly unnecessarily. You can take my word for it, too, for I know."

At this point I perceived that a man in a cab was waving signals to Power, who responded, and the cab drew up to the pavement.

"Well," he said, "that's a chap I've been after this week. We've business. Good-bye, old man. If you want to see Frank Melvil and spin a yarn with him, turn up at my diggings to-morrow at six and have chow, if your not spend-

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ing your Christmas-day somewhere—or drop in afterwards in the course of the evening if you'd like it better. My best chin-chin to you!"

We shook hands and I went on my way. I seemed to see the small wooden house, built on piles, up at the narrowest part of that fairy passage. The pearl-shell boats lay tilted on their sides on the sand below. The little group of naked children splashed about or swam in the sunny shallows. I could hear their shouts of laughter and their merry calls, and the snatches of the songs of the birds flitting from tree to tree came to me once more. Escaping by a sudden jump from the wheel of a buggy, whose owner was bawling at me as I loafed negligently over the crossing, it occurred to me that I must stop dreaming and attend to the daily proceedings of George Street and of my own business. After all it is probable, I thought, that I shall go to-morrow evening and see this owner of that "Eden of bland repose," "where the sea winds sing and the sunlight smiles." I was spending my Christmas-day nowhere but with my wretched self.

II.

POWER lives with a friend of his overlooking the river above North Quay. There they combine comfort and good cooking with a lovely prospect. The house is fairly large, divided into two by a passage down the middle. The whole of the left side is taken up by a big double room—study, sitting and dining-room in one—the far end opening out by two door-windows onto a broad veranda. Here in a variety of wicker lounges and easy chairs these luxurious bachelors are wont to smoke the best Manilla viâ Hong Kong cigars

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(imported free of duty) and look down, as from an eyrie, on to the road beneath and the blue winding river and clustering South Brisbane beyond. It was a lovely, mild, moonlight night with a faint cool breeze coming from the sea. Lighting a cigarette I came out from my boarding-house, turned up George Street, and made for my friend's house. I cannot say I was thinking much of Melvil or of anyone in Brisbane, unless it be of a dead girl who had passed from a small happy home that she had left desolate to lie in the grassy earth under the shadow of the city's western hills. Once or twice, as I passed on further by the illuminated houses behind their little gardens, fresh and exhaling with the recent rain, and heard the sounds of singing and laughter and music, the thought of another house, dark and empty, with blind windows reflecting the ghastly moonlight, came upon me and made me sad. Thus I reached my friend's garden gate, and flinging away my burnt-out cigarette, opened it and went up the flight of wooden steps and over the veranda to the door and rang and knocked. Mary, the ill-favoured domestic, who can make curries fit for an eastern, opened it, and, when I had put down hat and stick in the hall, showed me into the room on the left. Dinner was not yet cleared away. Wine (and whisky) and dessert, with all that solid comely English luxury of cut-glass and fair linen and softly gleaming silver which Power affects, made the pleasant semi-artistic room more pleasant still. The shaded lamp cast a mellow light on everything, and outside on the far veranda the wide-flung garden windows showed two men at ease in their wicker chairs, backed by dark foliage, the silver-gleaming river, the still and moon-lit town. I came across the room and stood by the right window. The soft Brussels carpet, into which the feet pressed gratefully, had muffled the sound of my entry. The man in the easy chair just before me looked up slowly. It was not Power. It was not his "mate," Carlyle. It was no one, I knew at the first glance, but Melvil. I think I see

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the face now. Certainly it was a fine one, full of suppressed and quiet force. The hair and beard were dark brown, streaked with grey, unkempt and straggling, yet waving naturally round the great moulded brow, with its broad frowning bar, like a thunder-cloud over the brooding threat of the curiously regular and sculpturesque eyes. The gaze reminded me of the bold, fixed, and inscrutable resolve of a sphinx. The nose was straight; the mouth red-lipped, impassive, and possibly rather brutal. All the rest of the face, except the prominent but delicately-lined cheek-bones and cheek, was hid by the hair, moustache, and beard. Power, who was lying in a lounge to the left, jumped up at once and welcomed and introduced me to Melvil, who rose and shook hands with me. His hand-shake was cordial, his manner quite simple and easy. In a few minutes I was lying in the lounge, into which Power insisted on putting me—wine and whisky refused—one of his Isola d'Oro cigars accepted, and conversation progressing pleasantly. Power sat in another easy chair in the middle, in the depth of the shadow of the wall between the two windows. Melvil alone, his shoulders and head, that is, was in the light. He was smoking a clay pipe. The moon was in the south, illuminating all the front veranda, but leaving us here quite in the dark. I lay still, a little thoughtful and pre-occupied, yet watching the man's face with interest. He was speaking to me. His voice was low, but I have never heard one more musical. The slow cadences fell like a sound of deep running water. He said he knew some of my work. A chance visitor to Maidenhair Passage had brought with him a copy of a little novel of mine.

"I do not read a book in a year," he said, "I think reading is a mistake. It has been the cause of almost all the trouble and mischief in the world. But I took up your book by chance and did not put it down until I had finished it. It is all false and diseased, the wretched, civilised life you draw there, but you draw it truly."

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"If I had told you," said Power to me, laughing, "that Melvil had read 'Maud Harcourt,' and would like to see the author, I knew you would not come. Similarly, if I had told Melvil that you had seen Maidenhair Passage and had heard a lot about its owner, I knew he wouldn't have *let* you come. It requires a little finesse to get two such shy birds onto the same perch."

"I begin to think," said Melvil quietly, "that you are a scoundrel, Power." He lifted his face and went on to me; "I cannot understand why you care to live in such a sphere as that which you have drawn in your book. I suppose it is the best which is to be found in these miserable filthy civilised cities. I was reading an article of yours in a Melbourne paper which Power gave me this afternoon, and you talked about the weary search for a new civilisation and a new life which goads the feverish modern man from city to city, from land to land. You had yourself passed from Melbourne to Sydney and then to Brisbane here, where you seemed to think you might find what you were seeking. That was foolish, as you have learned by now, I suppose?"

I acquiesced. It was a genuine pleasure to lie there and listen to this man talking. The speech was very singular in such a place; the sound of it was more singular still. But he paused now and I had to reply.

"That is true," I said, "but we end by accepting, not what we desire, but what we can get. And, after all, if we are dissatisfied with our civilisation, such as it is, ought we not to struggle to make it better, not leave it alone, to become what it pleases?"

"I do not think so. Other people's happiness does not concern me. If they are so foolish as to lead sickening existences and all the while pretend they are happy and keep boasting of it, that is their own look out."

"But the up-country life," said Power, "the life you have to lead out of reach of civilisation; it's all very well

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for a time, but a man gets tired of roughing it, as he does of everything else."

There was a pause.

"No," said Melvil, "no, I do not think so. If a man likes cant and pretence, he does. What is civilisation but pretence? Every social relation is a fraud. The very basis of it all—clothing—is one gigantic lie. For me, I prefer reality. A man's soul should be in his body, not in his clothes. This sickly, barbarous, 'civilised' hypocrisy disgusts me. Give us healthy, primal relations. They say we have sprung from apes, and certainly I think that we are going back into them. I," he proceeded in the same quiet tones, "do not often think of this. I think very little. But when I come down here into this wretched, dirty, stupid town I notice it."

There was another pause, a long one.

Some one, evidently a girl, began playing on a piano a little way off. It was a simple air, a plaintive melody whose divinity has not been utterly discrowned by even vulgar and senseless abuse. This was the prelude to her singing, for presently I heard her voice. It was a sweet voice, untutored, but somewhat marred by the occasional effort to sing with the detestable throaty twang which foolish pseudo-"musical" people think "fine." I conjured up the scene. The girl sitting, fingering rather unskilfully at the keys in her cool, white, summer dress, her face upraised a little, the light of the piano candles on it. The curtain bowing at the open window to the whispering pressure of the night breeze. No one else. Only I, looking and listening and thinking and remembering.

It would seem as if some similar train of thought had been suggested by the sounds of the mingled voice and piano to Power, if not to Melvil.

"I think I understand," said Power, "what you mean. I'm rather fond of savages, myself. I pick up their lingo quickly. And their ways amuse me. They are certainly

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simpler, or, when they lie, they lie as children do, and they don't in the least mind being found out. I don't really know but what I think their women are finer than ours. They don't last so long, of course, but they are as tender and faithful as dogs. Not the Chinese women; they are quite mercenary. But the Japs, or the Hindoos, and mostly any of the coloured races. They have eyes, some of them, like Gordon setters—great, deep, dark and liquid, full of love. There was a Jap girl I saw one day at Port Darwin, and she had eyes . . . I say, Melvil," he broke off, "I've wondered often and often where I saw a girl before with eyes like hers, and now I remember. There was that girl at the Passage. I forget her name. It was the first morning after I came and we were walking along the beach. You recollect? She was carrying her baby down to the water. The little beggar couldn't walk yet, but he could swim like fun. She put him in the shallows and laughed at him, and then she jumped in herself and began playing with him, taking him out into the deep water. We stood and watched them. That was the girl. Her eyes were like that Port Darwin Jap girl's."

"Nini," said Melvil.

"Yes, Nini; that's her name. She had beautiful eyes. I remember her well. How is she?"

"She is dead."

"Dead?"

"She was killed just before I came down. The black fellows caught her or decoyed her out into one of the back runs and speared her. They speared the child, too. It was mine."

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III.

He said this with his calm unvarying simplicity, and, after a moment's silence, proceeded:

"Nini and the child were the final expiation for the Mysteries."

Our silence, full of a deep interest and suppressed curiosity, seemed to act on him. He raised his head a little and said:

"I was not living down on the shore then. It was five or six years ago. I had a log hut on the side of the first ridge. I had several here and there about the runs. The coast seems to be slowly rising all along that part. Very likely it is doing so all along the eastern slope. The first three ridges are of sand, with coral below, I expect. I had not really any idea that the blacks would trouble me. From time to time, of course, I had had to shoot or poison some, but not of late years. They were afraid of me. They thought I was a sorcerer or a god. This arose mostly from my invariable discovery of any of them who had stolen or speared my animals. The moment I found anything was missing, I used to get on my white horse, Leper (I have had three generations of Lepers), put two revolvers in my belt, and ride off to the camp. I always knew where they were. I had two or three blacks I could rely on. Five miles back there was a boora. That is a sacred spot, one of the places where the lads are initiated and become men. It is a curious formation, a small clump of hills with great exposed slabs of dark, granite-like rock towering up into the blue, with violent gorges and intricate caves. Everywhere about are the sacred carvings—rude pictures of animals and men, or of things, such as boomerangs and shields, or the lightning and the rain. These always interested me, and I was not satisfied till I understood them.

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But even my blacks, who were ready to do whatever I ordered them—to kill themselves if needs be—would not tell me about the carvings. They pretended they did not know, and I had to make them drunk to get at the truth, bit by bit, by threats and cajolery. I have spent whole days and nights alone in the boora among the hills, and I do not think there is much I do not now understand. Years ago, in South America on the Amazon, I unravelled the Indian carvings in the same way."

He paused for a moment, and, stirred though I was—curiously stirred, as at the approach of some mysterious influence—I yet remember hearing the notes of the piano, slow, soft, and clear, dreamily essaying the first bars of a melody full of smiles and tears.

"When I rode into the camp," he said, "I used to go straight up to the chief and tell him my grievance. Then I would have all the men and lads and gins put in a line and ride down it, looking at each. If the thief was a weak fool, he would be terrified as I fixed my eyes on him. If he were brave and had any intellect, he would be careless, but always too much, and generally a bit defiant. I always shot the thief on the spot—right through the heart. It is opposite one's barrel. Sometimes the thief would not be there, but be hidden away somewhere. Then I would demand him to be brought out, and ask if they thought they could fool me? Biame is the great god, the terrible power. He has many shapes, but it is always as something which strikes. On the stones he is the boomerang in full flight, or the spear, or above all the lightning. The initiation is by grades. First of all the god is shown under the figure of a man. Then he is recognised in the whirl of the boomerang; then in the rush and stab of the spear. Last of all he is to be known as the great exterior power—the irresistible flash of the lightning. I would say to the young men: 'I am Biame, the figure of the man!' Then to the others I would add, raising my

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voice and speaking to each according to his grade: 'Know me in the whirl of the boomerang! Know me in the rush and stab of the spear! Know me in the irresistible flash of the lightning!' I am Biame. I slay you!' With that I would shoot the man right through the heart. It was because I knew their language and religion and social laws so well that I could bring new ideas of force and terror into them. At last the old men spoke to me openly of the Mysteries, but with much cunning and inner reservations, trying to find me at fault. There are primal notions of theirs, vague, great, nature myths, which I have not yet grasped the meaning of and of which I do not think they themselves have any real idea. This last attempt to kill me came from the despair and jealousy of the most remarkable man I ever knew among them."

The girl had changed her mind and had ceased essaying that melody full of smiles and tears. Dreaming tenderly to herself she let her hands wander almost aimlessly over the keys, passing from piece to piece without scarcely being aware of it.

"I was riding close to the boora," he said, "one sunset. I never pass within four or five miles of it without going to it. I rode up by one of the gullies. Presently I was entirely in the deep, cold shadow. It struck me as deep and cold. I remember I thought for a moment of the old phrase in the Bible—the valley of the shadow of death. I was on my white horse—Leper, the son. At the top of the gulley the rock suddenly rears up sheer, precipitous and flat. I happened to look up. A man was clinging to the face of it hundreds of feet above me, lean, naked, with tightened muscles and intense gestures. I knew in a moment what he was doing. He had been out there alone, fasting for days and nights, till the divine enthusiasm had come upon him, and now he was cutting out a sacred figure. I got down off Leper and stood and watched him for long. The light failed and still he worked on. It was the time of the full moon,

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which would rise up in the east over the sea and the coast. The dingoes were very restless, howling from time to time as they slouched through the scrub. They were always plentiful round the boora. The birds seemed restless, too. Still he worked on. The whole of his carving was already outlined and now he clambered up onto the summit of the rock to sharpen his flint axe. As he sat there squatting on his hams, his head bent down, rubbing round the flint in a hole in the rock, the moon rose slowly, huge, yellow, majestic in the pink pallor of the cloudless heaven. I knew it by the way he raised his head as the light reached him, and then, after a long pause, he began a low howling chant. I could not see what figure he had been cutting, but I guessed from his movements that it was a snake. Then I vaguely recalled the man. He had intellect. I think he must have seen me as I rode away out into the open, even if he had not heard the sounds of Leper's hoofs, though (I do not quite know why) I had been careful to keep off rock and stone as much as possible."

He paused again. The dual lines of thought, suggested by his wonderful manner of telling all this and by the notes of the piano, proceeded unbrokenly as the girl came back to the original melody and played it with a lingering passion that made me seem ready to sob and weep.

"The next day at about the same time—that is about sunset—I was sitting at the door of the hut on the sand-ridge by myself when I suddenly saw a figure to the right of me in front of some bushes at the edge of the clearing. Two of the dogs were were with me and they had not seen her yet. This struck me. She was looking at me fixedly—a young lubra, naked save for the little plaited rush-fringe round her loins. I had never seen her before. At least I did not remember her then. We looked at one another till she moved and began to come forward hesitatingly. I forbade the dogs to rise or bark. At last she came close enough to hear me as I spoke. She never took her eyes off

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mine, frightened, I saw, but fascinated. As I looked at her I loved her."

He paused again. He seemed to be going ever in his mind their first meeting—her words and his own.

"She had seen me," he said, "the last time when I rode into the camp. That day I shot her only brother. It was months ago. I did not know it till after. She had heard me speak of Biame. Before this the Mysteries of the men had enthralled her, and she had risked her life in attempting to get to understand them. She was Nini. She had heard them speak of me as Biame, the whirl of the boomerang, the rush and stab of the spear, the irresistible flash of the lightning. She would come to me now with an offering, and, though she should be consumed, it would be happiness. There was only one man left of the tribe of the Red Snake. She was of the tribe of the Sea Eel. It was lawful for the men of the Red Snake to marry the women of the Sea Eel, but the tribe of the Shark had utterly destroyed the Red Snake twelve moons past—all save this one man. I knew it, she said. I was Biame; what had she to tell me? Nevertheless, she would tell on. Well, this man was a great mystery man, and he alone of the Sea Eel tribe, with whom he now lived, still hated and fought against Biame. He had said he would kill me, and he had devoted me to swift death and the vengeance of the true Biame, having gone a week ago into the desert and to the boora in the hills to fast and pray. This morning he had come back and all had been made ready. Fourteen of the young men had bound themselves to him with great oaths to kill me. Early in the morning of this night, just as the star rose which makes all the birds to sing, they would fall upon me in the house. I should be quite alone. They knew it. I listened to all she said and drew her to my knees and kissed her and called her by her name. Had I been wiser, I should have known of all this myself, but I had not. Now I remembered and understood. I loved her

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before she spoke. She came, bearing an offering. It was not to me that she was to be a victim, happy to be slain. I could only love her, even as Hadrian did Antinous, who died in the Nile waters, a sacred sacrifice to unknown powers."

There came a long silence. He sat there motionless, looking down, full of thought.

IV.

At last he turned his head in the slow, deliberate way he had, as if turning the whole of his body with it. I cannot quite tell why, but I felt somehow as I suppose someone would do who had vivified the statue of a man of the old Pagan civilisations and was listening as it spoke. Perhaps it was his allusion to Hadrian and Antinous and my memory of hours spent in the cool and shadowy Louvre gallery in Paris before the supreme bust of the Bithynian, the wonderful record of his mysterious, voluptuous, mocking beauty, rising divinely derisive through suffering and agony and the passion and grief of others. And all the while there were the notes of the piano, the sweet and simple musical reverie of the white-clad girl with her upraised face in the light of the candles—the girl come back for this one hour, in despite of fate, from her bed in the grassy earth under the shadow of the city's western hills.

"As I was digging on through the quiet hours of the night," he said, "I realised the whole tale and wondered I had missed it so. And I knew the soul of the Red Snake and of Nini. The hut had no floor; it was only the beaten sand. I had a pick and a spade, and I set to at once to dig a deep hole directly by the door—on the inside, I mean.

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Nini sat and watched me, her eyes glowing, and the dogs sat outside the threshold and watched. They had judged rightly that I should be quite alone. All the men and gins were away. Some were shepherding, some here, some there at their huts. I like to live in a hut for a week or two and then go on to another. That was before I started pearl-shell fishing. I liked the station-house on the shore better than any place I ever lived in. I like it still. But I dislike the steamers passing by it. That drives me inland wandering again. Nini called it her love-place—Nini, Nini! The moon rose presently, and the light came in on me faintly from the left as I was working in the pit. She was not as full or as radiant as the night before, and there were still banks of misty cloud scarcely distinguishable right round the east and spreading to the north and south. When I had dug the pit so deep that I could not easily throw up more sand out of it, I ceased. I had packed up the sand all round the room, banking it firmly, and making the pit several feet deeper. In one place on the far side of it, just opposite the door, I cut down the bank somewhat, so as to have a small firm platform to stand on. It was midnight before I had done, and then I ate food—bread, water, and fruit. Nini would not eat. She was getting frightened, and sat with her face between her knees, shivering. Then I made her go out down to the shore and wait for me there by a certain tree. She could go best by herself, and I knew we were being watched now. She stole out and away, using the shadow and the trees, and waiting till the moon was clouded, Then I whistled for Leper, and took him down to the shore with the dogs. I passed the tree and saw her lain along by the roots, but did not stop or say anything. I left the dogs with Leper in a good open place. He had the best chance of not being speared there, for I thought that, unless they actually met him, they would be taken up completely with me. Then I came back to the hut. I knew I must have passed among them, but I was quite safe. My hour was a

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fixed one. I had my rifle and two revolvers all loaded. That made thirteen. I wanted fourteen; so I would have to reload once. I had a torch ready stuck in the wall above the small platform, and a long piece of cord rolled round on a nail beside it. I left the door on the latch. By this time a slight land breeze was blowing. They came up just before dawn. The false dawn is the converse of the after-glow—the coloured vanguard of the sun's coming, and the rear-guard of his going. Just as the false dawn arose, they rushed the door. I waited a few moments and struck a match, and touched the torch, which blazed up. They were all in the pit—every one of them. I shot them one after another as they presented their left sides. They were like rats in a bag. Only the last rat in a bag will bite your hand. I had fourteen to kill and one to save. As I shot out one cartridge from one of the revolvers; put in a new one, and clicked it round the four times before cocking, I saw there were only two alive. The land breeze blowing from the west caught in the swung-open door, which ran out almost due south, and poured into the room, clearing out the smoke. They were almost all young men—men of the third or fourth grade. The Red Snake and the other one were lying back against the far side of the pit. They were both quite quiet, staring at me. The moonlight and the red glare of the torch mingled curiously. I shot the other one straight through the heart. I knew his face well. I had not spoken one word. Then I put down the revolver; took the cord from the nail, and jumped straight down on to the Red Snake. I knew the whole tale now, and also how it regarded him and Nini. I caught his wrists and bound them. Then putting my feet on his shoulders, I pulled up his hands within reach and dragged him up by them. I whistled for Leper and the dogs, and presently scrambled out up onto the threshold with the cord. They came, the dogs first and then the horse, breaking through the bush. I got up onto Leper, lifted the Red Snake by his arm-pits

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and flung him across in front of me. Then we set out. The dawn was here now and I rode fast. The sun got up as we neared the boora. I ascended by the same gully as two sunsets ago, and stopped where I had stopped then. It was all chilly and dark here yet, but the flat, rocky summits that faced eastwards were just glinting with light. As we stopped, three or four gaunt bony dingoes started from the bushes and slouched away. I commanded the dogs not to follow. The dingoes went up to the gully a little and turned, looking at us and grumbling. There was a coolibar tree just by."

The girl, wandering away into vague music or snatches of other airs, returned suddenly to the melody full of smiles and tears, and struck the notes of it with greater firmness. I almost thought I heard her voice accompanying two or three of the notes.

"The coolibar is a crooked and stunted tree, always in watercourses and everywhere to the west of the Great Range, but rare here on the coast. I undid the cord from his wrists, and, drawing his arms behind his back, refastened them and cut off the remainder. With this I lashed his ankles. Then I lifted and lashed them up to the first partition of the coolibar's boughs, lying him on his back. As he looked up he could see his carving on the rock in the growing radiance of the golden light. We looked up at it together."

The words of the singer were clear and distinct now:

"The birds singing gaily that came at my call."

And then no more—only the melody, softer and softer.

"It was the Red Snake and Biame, the flash of the lightning. The Red Snake—square-snouted, thin, whip-like, furious—was in full back-leap at it with open jaws. The lightning was not the usual lightning—the zig-zag. It was the zig-zag lost in a vague sheet—the summer lightning, the false lightning. The Red Snake would bite and consume the false Biame. The ancient god would slay the

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young wielder of his force, the reckless dispossessor and usurper. I turned to go. Then for the first time he opened his mouth. He said: 'The Red Snake is struck and broken and is to writhe helplessly and be consumed alive by the hateful dogs. The new Biame is the stronger All is given to him. The land of the old Biame is his and the life of his mouth and the love that comforted his limbs. Take all, but not yet without some vengeance-gift in return. The new Biame shall give of his own. The life that comes from him shall he give, and the love that shall comfort him, and then he shall rule and destroy as he will, till the hour of torment and impotence shall take hold of him also. Behold, before the black men were here the sacred land was here, and before the old Biame it was here, and after the white men are gone and after the new Biame is gone, it shall be here.' Then he closed his lips and I mounted and rode away. I had still much to do. I had to take all the men from the pit and lay them in a row in the sun for their friends to come and see, and fill it up again."

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home!" broke out the voice with lingering passion, and then the melody again.

"I looked back once as I came to the turn in the gorge. The dingoes were all round him, lolling their tongues out, grumbling and whining impatiently, glaring with their hollow, hungry eyes, working up their courage to attack and devour him."

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home!" And then, as the melody came, there came also a wild dark whirling of everything—waving trees and grass under dusky hills, snatches of birds' song and shouts and merry calls of children splashing in sunny shallows; wreathing mist and the divine derision of a rising face; towering black, flat rocks, sunlit and cut with temple figures of reptile and natural faces; a girl with great deep, dark, liquid eyes, full of love, gazing piteously, and then with grey eyes and a

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lighter face smiling sadly and essaying the clear notes of her young virginal voice. Then all grew confused, whirling, thudding terribly like a train at full speed, convoluting and extending itself in mid-air like a long thin snake, and whirled away into the rushing darkness and silence.

* * * * *

What I remember next is lying in a dim, light-shot atmosphere with someone holding a glass of whisky to my lips. Then I spoke and said that I was sorry and that I must have fainted. I was not well; the work and the heat had been trying me very much the last few weeks. Power's face was there and Melvil's, and they were both very kind. Melvil's was even tender.

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KATE ROBINSON.

I.

When Nellie Munro made up her mind that she would stay at home no longer, but set up in a little shop on her own account in town (in town meant Melbourne), one of the few friends in whom she confided was Kate Robinson. The two girls had known one another as children. Old Robinson had "made his pile" before Kate was born, but that resulted in little difference in his manner of life or of his family's. At his wife's insistence he consented to buy a small station within thirteen or fourteen miles of Melbourne, which was "only worse," as Mrs. Robinson mournfully remarked, because now they were near enough to want to be "right in," and were after all just as far off as ever! The railway—which has made of Hastings, with its three divisions of Hastings, Middle Hastings, and Hastings Beach, a fashionable Melbourne suburb—was then undreamed of, and the place was, practically speaking, in the bush. Old Munro was the doctor—then the sole doctor there—and the only Hastings people the Munros knew were the Robinsons, and *vice versâ*. Dr. Munro was one of those demoniac sort of characters which are more frequent in the lives of country families all over the world than is generally supposed. He had brains and a certain amount of manners, and both of

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these he was generally wont to produce for the benefit of strangers and acquaintances, with whom he was said to be "popular." At home his brutal selfishness shone out with an intensity that occasionally reached the pitch of madness. He had married twice, and had four daughters by his first wife. He had allowed his children to grow up as they pleased, subject only to his own whims and brutalities. His eldest daughter had shown her feelings towards him by resolutely refusing, after her marriage, to recognise him at all. Nellie's two other sisters had almost followed suit, after having several times run away from home, and now Nellie, who had endured her utmost, through pity of her not too amiable step-mother, left alone to the doctor's tender mercies, had made up her mind that she would attempt to earn her own living. When she came of age a little money was due to her from her dead mother, and with this she determined to very literally set up shop as a tobacconist and fancy goods dealer in Melbourne. By this time old Robinson was dead, and Mrs. Robinson, with Kate, now her only daughter (one son had shot himself by accident, and the two others had been drowned by the capsising in a squall in Port Philip of the crazy little yacht which their father's parsimony had purchased for them), was installed, after some little preliminary trouble and misadventure, in a fine house in Toorak, and doing her best, with a soured, ill-conditioned, and premature old age, to enjoy herself. Kate was quite a Melbourne personage. "Everybody" knew her, but this popular reputation was not of the pleasantest description. No stories of her were deemed too extravagant to be credible. She wore her hair, which was jet black, cropped short—a very unusual thing for girls not so many years ago. She was tall, almost six feet, with the splendid massive ease of the Venus of Milo. Stays and corsets she held in abomination, but not even her inevitable loose waistcoat with pockets, and the originality of her cut-away jackets, could disguise the fact of a bust and

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torso worthy of days when women had not learned the hideous barbarities of the modern toilet. Dresses were worn tight and drawn back then, but hers were loose to give play to her long swinging strides, and in the early mornings the greener, fresher, outskirts of the town beheld her riding alone in trousers and tunic, galloping, taking "stiff" places, or walking along thoroughly enjoying her thoughts and a cigarette. Happening to be one of the richest girls in Melbourne, and also, despite her brown, swarthy skin, one of the most beautiful ("pretty" was a word that made her arch red lips curl abnormally with a scornful ascent), all this, as was natural, created much comment. Her manners with men were considered of the freest. Often at four o'clock she would be seen striding along with someone (and too often with someones, whom that curious, vulgarised, but withal healthy and energetic little coterie, which calls itself Melbourne "society," considered nobodies), chatting and laughing (and, if Miss Robinson was amused, her laughter would make the fact patent), "doing the block," with a sort of indifference or ignorance of the sensation she was causing that was viewed as "loud" or defiant, or both, by her less emancipated sisters. She brought a perfectly untrammelled ingenuousness to bear on all with which she had to do. Outside the circle of those who really knew her, there foamed the inevitable sea of slander and calumny. But the men who thought her acquaintance easy to make, and herself the object of more or less modified impertinence, soon found out their mistake, and became of the number of her friends and partisans, or retired to develop into sources of foul innuendo against the girl who had abashed them. Women friends she had but two, and these were almost adorers; not but what she was always kindly to her own sex, but her own sex received the communications and attentions of such a personage with a suspicious dislike which was never overcome. Kate did not think of troubling to overcome it. Like her mother, her

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great, her sole object in life was to enjoy herself. Mrs. Robinson wished to enjoy herself in other people's way, Kate in her own. That was the difference. Kate had only her simple downright intuitions to trust to—the intuitions of a girl who had lived in the bush all her life, and now was proceeding, with unlimited resources in the way of money, to live in the same spirit in the town. She was very happy. She had as yet had but one cross in her new career, but that had really provoked and troubled her. Minnie Gentle, her greatest friend (for during the last two years circumstances had necessarily kept her somewhat apart from the other, Nellie Munro), had managed to make the acquaintance of that lovely and talented stranger whom Melbourne "society" knew for so short a period as Mrs. Brown, and who presently flamed up, comet-like, the popular stage-idol of the hour, as Maddy Brown, or (more shortly still) "Maddy." Kate first saw her (as it happened) on the first night of her greatest success, "Les Boulevards," and at once conceived an ardent desire to know her. Miss Gentle had undertaken, through her friend Stuart, the journalist (who was said to be something nearer and dearer still to "the fair Creole" than a mere friend), to bring this about. A few days later, on the last night of the old year, as everybody knows, Mrs. Brown was mysteriously murdered. Kate took quite a personal interest in the matter, and it was a standing annoyance to her that the murderer was never run to earth, but to all appearance escaped scot free. Then Nellie Munro's trouble came to distract her attention, and she threw herself into the plan with her accustomed ardour. It was she who insisted that nothing would do for her friend but a central position.

"That's half the battle, Nellie," she said emphatically. (Nellie was on a week's visit at the Robinsons', and the two girls were deep in consultation up in Kate's boudoir.) "It must be Collins Street or nothing!"

"But the rent," said Nellie.

"Bother the rent! *I'll* pay the rent!"

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"No, you wont't Kate! Now, you promised—you know you promised—you wouldn't talk in that way any more. Mightn't I as well have come and stopped here with you all along?"

"—I meant, *as an investment*," said Kate; "You should pay me interest if you wanted! *Some* people are so proud!"

"So would *other* people be, if they were *poor!*"

"How much did that man want for that little hole by the bank?"

"Five pounds a week."

"Nell, old girl, you must take it! I'm sure it's wisest. I wouldn't advise it if it wasn't wisest. You will do a grand trade there! All the fellows on the block will go to you. I'll send every man I know, and you are not to give them back any change!" she added seriously.

"You dear!" said Nellie, rising and kissing her; "and if you and Minnie will only promise to buy all your cigarettes from me I shall make a pile in six weeks, and the three of us will go to Europe together."

They both laughed.

"That's understood," said Kate.

II.

NELLIE'S shop turned out a real success in every way, the first week's profits reaching the very respectable sum of £20, and the second and third £10 as much again. Kate was jubilant, and at last succeeded in persuading her friend to let her furnish the little back-room, in order that the Trio (Miss Gentle, of course, was the third) might spend pleasant

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afternoons together over tea and cigarettes. Then Kate gave free vent to her fancy, and this little back-room, sacred to the virginal deliberations of the three, blossomed out into an oriental luxury which excited the keen curiosity of a wonderful number of people both in and out of Melbourne "society." No profane eye, however, male or female, had as yet succeeded in penetrating it. Heavy embroidered curtains beyond the sole port of entrance retained the secret of the penetralia whence the small silver press bell fixed in the counter called forth the shopkeeper. At times Kate herself might be seen behind the counter, and, as she had a powerful imagination in the matter of prices, and never could persuade herself to learn the mysterious "secret code" with which Nellie was wont to mark her articles (after the approved manner of the trade), the till had a way of replenishing itself on such occasions that was really startling. Had not the Trio emphatically favoured the early-closing movement, there can be small doubt that Nellie would have had few hours of peace from the eagerness of her customers. This idea of early-closing was Nellie's own, and had arisen from two causes. First, she thought ten hours (nine to seven) was quite sufficient "work" for anyone. Secondly, she soon found that the evening customers were not of a sort she liked; or, rather, the descent of night seemed to act troublesomely on the male intellect, and Nellie preferred to see the Sprightly Messenger (as the Trio had named the small boy who took down and put up the shutters and, as he alleged, "made hisself ginerally usefil") closing up her establishment at seven, and herself on her way home to her boarding-house.

One morning, at about ten o'clock (it was in November, almost a year since the Madeline Brown tragedy), Kate, in a white diaphanous toilet of more than ordinary freedom and attractiveness, a lace parasol in one hand and a book in the other, burst into the shop, and held out the book with some excitement.

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"Have you read it?" she asked.

Nellie looked at it. It was a thin book, bound in deep blue cloth with gold letters and (what presented itself to her as) a "twiddle" of gold in the right bottom corner. Along the top, in two lines, she read: "Echoes: Frank Hawkesbury."

"No," she said, "I haven't."

"It's splendid!" said Kate. "I mean, it's very sad, ve-ry sad. He's written two other books of poems, 'Random Rhymes,' and . . . and I forget the name of the other at this moment, I am so upset. Nellie, the 'Random Rhymes' are as good as Gordon."

"I don't believe it," said Nellie.

Kate dropped the parasol and began to quote:

"'O the wild rush past grass, tree, and bush,
The whistling wind and the sun!
Where it is if you'll tell, we'll ride into hell,
And out again ere we have done!'

"That's one now—a kangaroo hunt. I went down yesterday in a hansom, full pelt, to the publishers, and got them all. And I couldn't get to sleep last night till I'd learned the best of them by heart."

Nellie gave in her qualified approval of the quotation. But Kate was in no mood for approval; it must be enthusiasm or nothing.

"Listen to this," she said, "it's where he's waiting at dawn before he goes a ride with Alison. Alison is the girl he loves. I wonder who she is?—

"'For, O, in an hour, an hour that's a minute—
An hour that's an age—I shall be by her side!
And then shall we ride a race that has in it
A race for a soul! Ah God, shall I win it?
Better it would be than fail to have died.'"

Nellie's appreciation of the second quotation was somewhat spoiled by the entry of a customer, but she made no movement to attend to him till Kate had finished.

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"That's fine," she said, passing along the counter, "but it's not like Gordon."

"It's as fine *as* Gordon, Nellie," said Kate solemnly, "and it's got more behind it!"

They were now both looking at the customer. He had a striking face and figure. He was a small but well-made man, with a tendency to muscular leanness. Even as they looked, his face had undergone a singular change. At first it might have been called handsome, and his manner frank, free, and open; now the features had taken such a contracted intensified look, and his movements were so nervously acute, that the whole man seemed to have suffered distortion. It seemed as if he were suddenly seized by some keen pain, spiritual and physical, and were being racked by it. Then as suddenly this look, too, changed, and an ineffable weariness passed over him, turning his face grey, making it look shrunk to half its natural size. Nellie's kind grey eyes, surveying him as he leant against the counter, grew kinder still.

"Can I give you anything?" she asked. "Shall I get you a glass of water? Are you ill?"

He looked at her with a strange intent look, and then smiled. The smile made Nellie aware of an inclination to cry, which astonished her a little and set her wondering at herself.

"No, thank you," he said, "I'm all right."

"Do you know that poetry I was quoting?" asked a voice beside her. This was Nellie's second astonishment in something under a quarter of a minute, and it did not decrease when she turned and looked at Kate's face, and particularly Kate's eyes.

The stranger smiled again, but the weariness made the smile seem mechanical.

"Yes," he said, "I know it well."

"Perhaps you know the man who wrote it?" proceeded Kate, putting one hand on the counter and drawing the book towards her with the other. The two were not a yard apart, the counter between them.

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"Yes, I know the man who wrote it."

"Well," said Kate, "I think it's grand—just grand!" She added: "And I would give a great deal to know him."

"He is not worth knowing."

"Not—worth—knowing? Why, he is a *poet!*" No little English servant girl whose chief mental pabulum was the "London Reader," where dukes and earls and duchesses and countesses tread on Olympian ether at a penny a week, could have said more reverently: "Why, he is a *lord!*"

The stranger seemed to rouse himself to a little personal interest in this large, brown, beautiful girl who was talking to him in this way, in a Collins Street tobacconist's.

"If he is a poet," he said, "he is a poor one—only an echo of others. But as a man, he is an idle, helpless, worn-out creature, with not a healthy desire left him in the world, unless to wish to die and not have the real courage to kill one-self be a healthy desire."

Nellie perceived that the stranger spoke of himself. With Kate it was only a dim sweet sensation, too unreal to have to do with actual thought, and speech, and action. Then the stranger seemed to become aware that he had come in there not to have the deepest remembrances and regrets of his life stirred up, or to indulge in bitter reflection, but to buy a packet of cigarettes. Accordingly, he made a request to Nellie, as to the apparent mistress of the establishment, to that effect; paid his sixpence, and with a bow and slight lift of his hat, went out.

"I have no presence of mind whatever," said Nellie, regarding the sixpence in her palm for a moment before dropping it into the till; "I ought to have asked him a 'bob.' It was one of the large packets."

Kate heaved a sigh and turned away.

"That's him," she said in the low tone of a reflected discovery, "Frank Hawkesbury, the poet!"

"Why, yes, old girl," said Nellie, "that's him—and a precious miserable, bilious-looking fellow he is. I always

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feel low-spirited when I read poets—even Gordon. I wouldn't marry a poet for worlds."

"Not even Gordon?" asked Kate.

"O, he's dead," said Nellie, "and besides, he was married to somebody else."

"Yes, he's dead," said Kate, "and, besides, he was married to somebody else."

III.

KATE did not come to see her friend the next day, nor the next, nor yet the next, somewhat to Nellie's surprise; but as trade was brisk, and as she had plenty of small family troubles of her own on hand, she had paid no great heed to it. On the fourth day, in the afternoon, Minnie Gentle came in, full with news to the overflowing. Minnie had been away for a short visit to Sydney, and she had a lively, veracious, and minute account to give of her own doings, and of the manners, dress, and so on of the ladies and gentlemen of Sydney. There was a certain amount of this which interested Nellie (what woman can resist particulars of the feminine toilet?) and a good deal which did not. Minnie had arrived by the overland mail the day before yesterday. Nellie suddenly asked her if she had seen Kate yet?

"Kate?" said Minnie. "Oh yes! she was at the Medwins' last night."

"What was going on there?" asked Nellie.

"Why, good gracious, you don't mean to say you don't know? It's the big ball Mrs. Medwin gave for Sydney Medwin and his wife. They've just come back from their honeymoon, and he looks sleepier and stupider than ever.

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Kate made herself rather conspicuous, too. But that's her way, isn't it? She can't help it. Everybody has to look at Kate. She was talking all the night with Frank Hawkesbury. It made Mrs. Medwin *so* angry! She was quite rude to him when he came to say good-night. It's the first time, too, she ever invited him to Mount Gordon. Charlie Broomfield told me he was a boundary-rider or shearer, or something, on one of the Medwins' stations a few years ago, before he was rich and famous. Kate seemed quite struck with him. She introduced me, and we talked a bit, but I thought he was so slow I can't tell you! He only danced once—a waltz with Kate—afterwards. He did that new American step—*you* know—up and down, and backwards and forwards, and I must say it was just grand. I didn't know Kate could dance it. She's promised to teach me, and I've promised to teach Charlie."

At this point the press-bell on the counter sounded, and, with an injunction to Minnie to put the kettle on and make some tea, Nellie passed through the curtains into the shop. Other customers followed on this one, and by the time she returned the gas stove had boiled the water, the tea was brewing, and Minnie was cutting some bread and butter as nearly approaching the wafer-like convolutions approved of by the Trio as good intentions and second-rate bread-cutting powers would allow her.

"Say, old girl," said Minnie, looking up from her handiwork, "do you know there's such a nasty smell at that end of the room? It's like drains."

Nellie admitted that she had noticed it, particularly by the cupboard, where their little store of tea, bread, butter, milk, and biscuits was kept. She noticed it first about a week ago, and it was getting worse.

"Do you know," said Minnie, "Mrs. Sydney Medwin does look such a fright in her new dresses. She's gone and piled on rich heavy materials till she looks quite a vulgar little toad. Why, there's Kate!"

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Nellie turned with a start. Kate was standing in the middle of the curtains, smiling at them. They welcomed her with enthusiasm, and the third cup was produced with acclamations of reunion. It was one of their brightest conclaves.

Daylight had almost passed into dark before Minnie was the first to break up the party, and then Kate told Nellie that she was going to take her home to dinner, and Nellie agreed. Kate lay on the sofa, reading and drinking another cup of tea, while Nellie attended to her frequent customers, dodging in and out for a few moments' talk the while. Then the hour came for closing, and the Sprightly Messenger was goaded on into putting up the shutters with unusual despatch, and before the G.P.O. clock had chimed out the notification of seven, they got into a cab, the driver was told to drive quickly, and they were making for Toorak. Dinner was at seven, and "mother," though wont to submit pretty quietly to Kate's doings, had a way of being peevish if kept waiting for her meals, and Kate hated peevishness too much to provoke it needlessly. There was a little constraint between the two girls, and they both felt it, and both knew the other felt it, and yet they did not like to enter upon the subject directly. Nellie had divined that for the first time in the history of their friendship she had a genuine rival. Kate would willingly have spoken to her of Hawkesbury, but thought Nellie would resent it. Nellie, on her part, was very proud and would ask for no confidence which was not spontaneously tendered. Perhaps if things had been in a different condition as regards Kate and her new friend from what they really were, she might have spoken of him openly and at once to her old friend, but this was not the case. The two girls spent the whole evening together, and parted without the one subject that was nearest to them both having been broached.

A week passed—two weeks—three weeks. Kate came occasionally to the shop but only for a few minutes. She

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was growing more listless and pale each time, it seemed to Nellie, and she would sit in the little back room or lie on the sofa for half an hour or an hour while Nellie attended to her business, reading or thinking, and scarcely seeming to care to speak. Then she would not come for three or four days, and all the while the other felt that she was seeing Hawkesbury often, and that developments of great moment in the mutual relations of the two were taking place. Once or twice she expressed her anxiety about Kate's health; she looked ill; she should go away for a change. The summer months were too trying in town, what with the heat and dust and showers and changes. Kate admitted that she was not feeling very well, but she would "work it off." Occasionally Minnie came in, and in the flood of her talk the name of Hawkesbury, or of Hawkesbury and Kate together, would occur, but Nellie would ask no questions, and Minnie troubled herself little with connected theories on either people or things. At last matters reached to a crisis. Kate came in one afternoon looking wretchedly ill, and, after having some tea and dawdling about in the back room a little, went out and said that it was stifling in there, and she would go home. Three days passed, and she did not come again; so, on the fourth, Nellie determined to go to Toorak after dinner and try to catch her. On arriving she was told Miss Kate was up in the boudoir, and mounted alone. Nellie opened the door quietly and entered. A candle burned on the table at which her friend was seated, and Nellie, unobserved, stood and looked at her.

A strange, dull, fevered breath played heavily on the beautiful face. The eyes had a dazed look, as from the intolerable ache of the bewildered brain. The red lips seemed to burn with the hue of red-hot bricks in a smoking kiln. She sat there absently gazing at a newspaper spread in front of her on the table, one elbow stretched out and the hand propping the weary head. Nellie had a sudden panic. She had seen that look on a girl's face before, and it had meant fever and

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a desperate struggle for life. She came behind and put her arm tenderly round her shoulders, as only lovers and "mates" know how. But Kate did not seem to notice.

"What is it, Kate, old girl?" Nellie said, softly kissing her. "Are you ill?"

Kate shook her head, gave her one look, and then stared at the paper. With quick intuition Nellie saw what she was looking at. It was a little paragraph by itself—a list of the passengers by the Orient mail boat that had left Melbourne the day before. Half way through it, at the end of a line, and separate somewhat from the names that followed it, was this one—"Mr. Frank Hawkesbury." The two girls were in complete touch with one another in a few seconds. Kate slowly looked at her again, a dazed and dreary look, and putting both her arms onto the table let her head fall onto them. Nellie could neither speak nor move. Then all at once she saw Katie's body shaking—something of a sob, something of a shudder—and with a low cry knelt beside her, wrapping her with her arms, drawing her down to her.

"O Kate, Kate," she said, "my poor Kate!"

IV.

It was characteristic of Kate that almost at dawn she was up and on horseback and out for a long ride. She rode furiously at first. She had got it into her head that she would like to go out to Brighton Cemetery and look at Gordon's grave. This wild lovely burial ground had a great attraction for her. The curious struggle in it between the cultivated and natural flowers and shrubs, their twining

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rank luxuriance, like an amorous death-struggle, the unkempt untended grave of her poet, all this seemed to make a sort of temple for her darker and stranger moods. Once she used to come here pretty often, riding over from her old home by the sea-shore with a packet of bread and butter and a small bottle of water, lunching there and coming back after sunset. She had brought out Nellie with her on one or two occasions, but to that gentler and more everyday mind there was something repellent in the neglect of the dead that seemed implied in this rank and uncultivated luxuriance. Later on, in Melbourne, during a short visit of Nellie's the two girls had lit by chance on the St. Kilda Cemetery, and Nellie had confessed that this was *her* ideal, and Kate had acquiesced. No poem of Hawkesbury's clung to her more hauntingly than that on Gordon's grave, and the weary iteration and doubt of one of the last in the book of "Echoes," addressed to Gordon, and full of the feeling of suicidal death, seemed to her to be her own utterance to it all—

> "As you have pondered I ponder,
> As you have wandered I wander,
> As you have died, shall I die?"

Through her sick, fevered, and half-bewildered brain the cadence of the verse ran ceaselessly. Drought prevailed, and the air had all that sensation of clear wine which comes as the earlier misty hours pass into the settled warmth and radiant light of morning. The sun rolled up ruddy and gold, dominating the plain and filling her with a feeling akin to worship. All over the country the bright yellow broom lit up the hedges and fields, while here and there the gracious vagabond eglantine lifted up her delicate pink petals and scented the breeze. Orchards were thick with green or lit up with the clustering cherries. It seemed to her morbid fancy as if she were riding to a sort of death tryst. It was in the afternoon that Hawkesbury came there, in the afternoon of just such a day as this. She would be

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there before him, and lie and think and dream, till she saw him walking up slowly over the grass through the trees to the shattered column with its poet's laurel wreath. How well she knew the way he would come—his movements—the very look on his face as he lifted it up and saw her! He would pause a moment (only a moment) and then came right on, smiling a little in the way he had, so gentle, so like a soft hand laid on your brow to caress and soothe you, and lie down on the grass beside her, and they would talk together as they had talked sometimes in the past. She knew it all now! There was no hope. She had been blind not to see that. He could never love anyone else but Alison—his love, his queen, his goddess! And when death is so close to us, and so quiet and so sweet, why should we strive even for a moment, even in thought, to consider other things? They were not worth it. She understood now!

Her head was so heavy at last, such an intolerable weight of weariness, that when she reached the cemetery gates she scarcely knew what she was doing. She left the horse there with the reins over his head, trailing on the ground, and went on in. The violent exercise at first, the long ride, the growing heat, and the lulling breeze, gave her a feeling of blind suffocation and giddiness. All at once a big black blood-sucker lizard darted out into the path, and with up-raised head and body stood and stared at her intently. She stopped and gazed at it. Things were losing their objective reality to her. When she made a movement and the blood-sucker darted away into the earthen gutter at the side of the path and disappeared with a rustle, she began to laugh. She had a weird perception of the transformations of life and death, the desperate struggle of obscene animal life in this burial ground. But, after all, the flowers and shrubs and trees knew as much of the dear pitiful dead as these things did, and it was not all horror, but beauty too! She came on up to the grave and sat down and looked at it dreamily. She had quite forgotten that Hawkesbury had gone.

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She had intended to be back in time for breakfast. Her consistent theory of her health for the last two weeks or so was that she was indisposed, and that, as indisposition is best treated by being "worked off" (that was her favourite phrase), what could be better than a twenty-mile ride in the early morning? At the same time she fed her humour by going to a place that recalled all that was uppermost in it. But even her mother grew frightened as noon passed into afternoon and afternoon into evening, and still no sign of her. The great round harvest moon rose up ruddy over the lurid city, and then grew pale and clear, and at last attained to light and radiancy; and Mrs. Robinson, with Minnie Gentle, and Nellie goading her dull querulous apprehensions into excitement, paced up and down the veranda, and incoherently considered plans for making a search after her eccentric child. But what restrained her was the fear of annoying that child, who was wont to have her own way in her own affairs unquestioned. Nellie, however, objected that this case was a peculiar one. Kate wasn't well; indeed, Nellie was afraid she was going to be ill, very ill indeed. She had just the look about her that Nellie's sister, Polly, had when she was sickening for the fever. But neither Mrs. Robinson nor Minnie had noticed anything the matter with Kate lately. This angered Nellie, who came very near to administering a smart rebuke to the heedless Minnie. "There are some people," thought the girl to herself, "who never notice anything!" However, she succeeded in restraining herself, and, acting on her friend's impressionable mind, soon succeeded in getting her to take a similar view to her own, and presently they were urging energetic and prompt action in concert. It was long past eight o'clock when they all agreed that, if Kate did not appear by nine, they would have a search begun for her. Time after time the two girls had gone down the drive to the garden gate and walked a little way down the road on the lookout for her. Nellie now set off by herself, declaring that this was

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the last time, while Minnie remained on the veranda, persuading Mrs. Robinson, who was still a little peevishly afraid of such a bold proceeding as sending out the coachman, groom, and gardener in different directions after Kate, and letting the two girls do the same. All at once Minnie heard Nellie cry out something, and saw her set off at a run to the gate. Then she followed crying out also, "That's her, that's her!" and there sure enough, entering through the gate that Nellie had pulled open, was Kate on horseback in her riding habit. Even Minnie was struck by the listless attitude of her friend. Kate seemed utterly worn out, bent down, the reins fallen from one hand, no whip in the other, holding on loosely to the saddle. The three came up to the house in silence, Nellie leading the horse, full of anxiety. Kate did not answer their questions, but looked at them with a sort of childish, almost idiotic, heedlessness. Nellie lifted her down out of the saddle, and with her arm round her waist led her up to her bedroom, Minnie and Mrs. Robinson following. There Nellie at once assumed the post of director, sent off Mrs. Robinson to order warm water and blankets and tell Fanny (the maid) not to come in, while she and Minnie set to to undress Kate and get her into bed. The poor girl was quite passive. Now and then she looked up and around in that childish, almost idiotic, way that frightened Nellie, but for the most part she seemed oppressed by some great and dull pain. She said once or twice:

"O, my head! O, my head!"

Nellie's idea was to send for the doctor immediately, and when this was done she proceeded to clear the room, and then came and sat down by her friend's side, holding her hand and waiting. Kate seemed half asleep, and began to be very troubled. She seemed to think she had been at Hawkesbury's grave; she wandered on incoherently about him and herself, confusing him with Gordon, and sometimes speaking as if they were all dead and walking together about in a dark place under the earth, where there were

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blood-suckers and beetles and the roots of the trees and flowers. The sobs rose in Nellie's heart as she listened, and once when, in the childish voice of most of her ramblings, Kate tried again and again to remember a snatch of Hawkesbury's verse and could not, and was much distressed at it, Nellie covered up her face with her hands and felt that she might not be able to bear what she felt was coming. And yet she was spared one thing. She never guessed where the seeds of the disease had been sown in her friend; nay, that it was her own unconscious hand that had sown them.

The doctor took a very grave view of the case. He dreaded a bad form of typhoid—typhus even. At first he advised a trained nurse, but Nellie's simple advocacy of herself won him over, and he soon came to approve his complaisance. No nurse could have done better than Nellie did. Her whole life and being seemed centered in the desperate struggle they were waging with disease and death. She had never realised before her passionate love and attachment to her "mate." But the very passion seemed to have at once diffused and concentrated itself in a calm and infinite tenderness. The hardest thing of all was (as she had expected) to listen to the bewildered talk of the poor delirious lips, to see the beautiful unrecognising gaze of the troubled eyes. The case was short and terrible. Not a week before, all Melbourne had seen Kate at a great social gathering, her remarkable beauty touched with a new gentleness, a lovely irradiation that seemed like a halo coming from her, a sort of bloom like that which hovers round autumnal fruits and flowers, the exquisite presage of mild and mellow ripeness. Then the news came with the shock of an incredible event. She was dead; she had been ill only a few days. Her friend Nellie Monro had nursed her with the most admirable and touching devotion. Everything had been done that could be. Dr. Seymour attended her, and Dr. Laughton was called in at the end. A virulent

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case of suppressed typhus. She died in delirium. How dreadful! So young, so beautiful, so rich, and so peculiar!

And, as Nellie had stood there in that terrible sick-room with the two doctors and watched the death-clutch tighten remorselessly on the wasted body, and strangle the hoarse, gasping breath into eternal silence, a dull shudder too had shaken her from head to foot; she covered her face with her hands, and went into the next room, muttering to herself.

"Life," she whispered, "is horrible, horrible! And death is horrible too. It is all horrible!"

V.

Nellie had her own way with Mrs. Robinson as regarded the grave. Before the house at Toorak had been taken, Mrs. Robinson, as has been told, had gone to live at St. Kilda, but a fortnight's residence there in the early summer months had ended in a hasty migration. The streets reeked with the odours of the bad drains; an epidemic of typhoid broke out, and after a fortnight of it the panic-struck widow made up her mind that she would tempt Providence no further. Nellie had been with them for a week of this fortnight, and the two girls, who loved walks together, had found their way to the cemetery and spent many hours of delightful converse in the lovely place. They both of them had this liking for graveyards. Our sense of reverence and repose in churches is passing with our belief in what we hear enunciated there, and the secularised Australian is "terribly at ease in Sion." But the mystery of death, "this incommunicable sleep," where the wicked cease from

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troubling and where the weary are at rest, is still a living force with us. No one whom they knew was buried here. They loved the place simply for its beauty. And the little mutual promise that, if possible, they should be buried there, and together, and under a tree, sprang up as the natural fruit of this love. Nellie herself chose the grave, one as near as might be to the green bower where they used generally to sit, and a tall, dark, whispering cypress was at the head. Every now and then she would come out alone to see it, sitting there in the thick green grass, thinking and dreaming. She was very lonely. She made no new friends, now her "mate" was gone, and even Minnie Gentle had grown to seem frivolous and tiresome. The shop had been given up, and another, a bookseller's and stationer's, taken in a more quiet neighbourhood, and here, with an assistant, Nellie found herself fairly hard-worked but independent, and that was all she now seemed to care about.

It happened one Thursday that, leaving the said assistant in charge, she went off to spend one of her periodical afternoons at St. Kilda. It was more than a year since Kate had died. January, with its feverish heat and dust and showers, was over, and the autumn had broken with closing February mild and mellow. She came back by train, and passing out from the station and up Elizabeth Street suddenly found herself alone (if one may say so of two people momentarily isolated in the stream of passers) with a figure which recalled to her some man she had once known well. He was walking in front of her listlessly, his stick thrust through his arm, his head bowed, his hands behind his back. She was a little startled, and the hot flush banded itself across her brow. Then she made up her mind to speak to him. The first time she addressed him he did not hear her. The second time she accompanied her words with a light touch on the arm. He turned, and they looked at one another. It was the face of a ghost. The very skeleton skull peered

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out. The great slow eyes gazed from the depth of two dark-ringed caverns. The thin lips—red still, but pallidly red—were drawn back from the teeth that showed strangely bleached. The white cadaverous cheeks were hollow. The same impulse guided them. They went on together side by side in silence. Neither knew whether they had greeted one another. At last he spoke.

"It is very curious to meet you," he said. "I never expected it somehow. But you have something to say to me, I think, Miss Munro."

"Yes," she said, "I have."

He seemed to reflect a little.

"Shall we go up to the Gardens?" he said, "or sit down in one of the arcades? Are you tired?"

"No," she answered; "let us go on to the Gardens."

They went on together again in silence—all the way up Collins Street (neither of them thought of the little shop lower down), and across to the Fitzroy Gardens. It was close on sunset. The slanting light poured in a great banded tide through the trees. They went on till they came to a retired seat by a little pond, where the frogs, darting in the water from the edges, reappeared presently to breathe and gaze stolidly up after the manner of their kind. She sat down first, and then he.

There was a pause.

"So you've come back?" she said.

"I've come back."

"I want you to tell me why you went away."

"I will tell you. The woman I loved had gone away. I followed her. I could not help it."

Nellie was troubled.

"Then it was nothing," she said, "nothing—nothing to do with Kate—with Miss Robinson?"

He looked at her with surprise.

"Miss Robinson?" he repeated; "I don't understand."

Another pause.

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"She is dead," said Nellie softly.

"I heard so—I was told so. I am sorry."

Nellie flashed out.

"*Sorry?*" What do you mean? That's an insult to her! Sometimes I have felt I should have to go after you, and find you, and shoot you!"

"Shoot me?" (He sighed.) "I wish you would."

"And all the time it was another woman? I don't believe you!"

He was very gentle with her, and ready to explain, and at last she listened to him quietly. He told her that he had loved a woman here in Melbourne. He need not tell her her name, but perhaps she could guess. Well, that woman had never loved him; he had never imagined it; but she had pitied him, and her pity was more than another woman's love. He had no word to say of her but gratitude and worship. The time came when she in her turn loved. And so she left him here, and went with the man she loved to England. He had nothing to say of him but what was honourable, true, great even. He himself had no cause for complaint in anything. Well, he had tried to remain here and work and die, but he was a wretched, weak-willed idiot, and he could not. He had to follow her to England and see her once more, and then he thought he would be able to return and end it somewhere where she would never hear of him. He would not give her one pang. The thought of any sorrow to her was intolerable to him, and she was so piteous for all! He saw her; he saw *him*. Truly he was almost worthy of her. He was great. He might yet be England's Caesar, and she was with him as a queen, a goddess! It was well so—best so. He was content.

Nellie's soul revolted against the tale, although she felt that it was the simple, earnest, actual truth. Her heart was very sore for her Kate, her dead "mate." The phrase "maudlin sentimentality" rose before her, but those grave deathly eyes drove it back from her lips.

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"And," she said suddenly, "did Kate know of it all?"

"Kate?" he repeated, "Miss Robinson? No. How should she?"

"You've told *me* easily enough," said Nellie, "and why not her?"

"I understood," he said slowly, "that you had particular reasons for wishing to know why I went to England."

Nellie mused. She had indeed said so, and with a significant emphasis that scarcely bore denial. She turned her eyes onto his and looked at him earnestly.

"I believe you," she said. "There! I believe you." She held out her hand to him, and he took it. He was musing in his turn, and for a few moments he did not let it go. A strange brooding look was in his eyes. She was almost ready to be a little frightened of him.

"Do you mean," he said, "do you mean that she Miss Robinson I hope not!"

"I mean this," said Nellie, "that, while you were mooning and thinking yourself half mad about someone who didn't care a rap about you, and had married someone else and gone to England—jilted you, in fact—there was the most beautiful and noblest and best and cleverest girl in all Australia ready to But you men are the stupidest things in creation! You want killing off altogether. You're no good at all anyway. What does any girl want to go attaching herself to a *man* for, when there are other girls who love her and would die for her! I think men are coarse stupid brutes. They are the cause of all the suffering in the whole earth. I *hate* them!" She had a little paroxysm of rage, and then the reaction came, and she burst into a passion of sobs.

"Go away," she said, "go away!" You make me ashamed. To cry before a *man!* I hate you more than any of them. I could kill you. You killed *her*. Why shouldn't I kill *you?* I ask you to go away. You think I am hysterical. I am not. I only hate you as I should

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hate a murderer who killed the most beautiful thing in the world. I know all about it now. Perhaps you meant no harm. You weren't wicked. You were only stupid. Sometimes it's worse—far worse—to be stupid than wicked. Go away. That's all I ask of you now. Go away. Leave me alone."

He rose, looking at her with respect and even tenderness. He saw he would do best to go, as she asked him. He turned and went over the grass. The sun had set. A cool breeze was blowing. The light was failing quickly. When she raised her head and looked for him, she could see him passing into the dark shadows by the gate. Then he was gone, and she shivered. He seemed to have passed down somewhere into some place where he was for ever lost—the place into which Kate had passed—the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

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DR. FLETCHER'S LOVE STORY.

I.

I.

THE first time I saw Miss Turner was in Sydney at a garden-party at Government House. I remember the occasion perfectly. It was about a fortnight after my return from Europe. My mother persuaded me to go to the garden-party, and as I was standing alone by a large cement vase full of flowers at the end of one of the paths, I saw Miss Turner pass across a sward of grass in front of me. If it was not a case of love at first sight, it was something very like it. She was a new type to me. I never saw anyone quite like her. During my studies at Vienna and Paris (medical and surgical studies) I saw and knew ladies who had something of her perfection of form and movement; to this they added wit and knowledge of the world. In Edinburgh, again, I met ladies, girls, or women that is, who had a certain resemblance to her. But the one type wanted something that in her was quiet and fresh, and the other type wanted her maturity. This description and distinction is, I know, feeble. I am lacking in concrete imagination. I have always recognised this, and I believe that Professor

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Klein (Klein's name is European; he is the first surgeon of Vienna and the world) was right when he told me that this would prevent me from ever being among the really first class of diagnosists. None the less, I certainly had from the first moment I saw her a most concrete image in my mind of Marion Turner.

I went in search of my mother, so soon as Miss Turner disappeared up the steps of the house. She was walking with a young man and a young girl. The young man had all the air of a young Englishman of fashion. The young girl I did not notice.

I found my mother talking with Sir James and Lady Crosby. Presently they left her, and I took a chair beside her. I described Miss Turner and the young man I had seen with her, and asked what her name was?

My mother knew her at once.

"It is Marion Turner," she said.

I said to myself that if I could not marry Marion Turner, I would marry no one.

I asked who she was?

My mother answered at once:

"She is the daughter of Mrs. Turner, a very old friend of mine. Mrs. Turner is dead now. Marion was her only child by her first husband—John Turner. He was your father's greatest friend years ago, when we had a station. The Turners had the next station to ours. John Turner died fifteen years ago, I think, fifteen or thereabouts. He left everything to Mrs. Turner. Shortly afterwards she went home for a trip; she was delicate then, and the change, they all thought, would do her good. At Malta, however, she fell ill, and had to be left behind with Marion and her maid. Marion was then a child of four or five, I should think."

"Yes;" I said. "Well?"

"Well, at Malta she met Captain Field, and they were married there. She wrote and told me about it; though

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with little or no explanation or details. Captain Field was quartered with his regiment at La Valetta, and on their marriage he gave up his career in the army and they went to England. It was while they were in England that your father died, and the station was sold. When the Fields came out again, I saw very little of them in consequence; merely a visit now and then as they passed through Sydney."

"When did Mrs. Field die?"

"Wilhelmina, or as we called her, Willy—Mrs. Field—died three or four years after they came out. That was her child, Willy, with Marion and Lord Linaker. She left everything to her husband—unreservedly. He was much younger than she was. I have not seen him here to-day. I fancy Marion and Willy came with Mrs. Crowe."

"I wish," I said, "that I could know Miss Turner."

"There will be no difficulty about that," she said. "They have just taken a house in the Undercliffe Road, and are come to stop in Sydney."

A week afterwards I pleased my mother (and myself) by going with her to call on the Fields and Miss Turner at their house in the Undercliffe Road. It was named Lauderdale.

II.

When I sat in the drawing-room talking with Miss Turner, I was never so happy in all my life. The glass windows were all open, and past the balcony and garden and the rolling verdure of the little valley below, the harbour with its mingled sky and sea and woody promontories seemed a part of the beautiful room and herself. We looked at one

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another simply, and I knew she liked me as I liked her. I think I see her now sitting back in the large wicker chair by the window, the palm-fern leaves from a pot on the table hanging above her like a shadowy canopy. She was the finest Australian female type. I have seen other girls who had in common with her pure, firm perfection of form and face, something that reminds me curiously of the spring wattle, and a summer fruit that is at once so free from over-ripeness and under-ripeness that one can only return to the old phrase and call it perfect. My description is feeble again, and perhaps even false, being a trifle coarse. I never could describe things, I mean places and people. That is my want of concrete imagination, I suppose. Marion was to me something complete and inexpressible, like Mont Blanc or Venice. When I try to draw her picture, I only blot and blur it. But it always returns in its clear outline again. I remember our talk well. We spoke of Europe. She had seen England—London, that is, and several places in the country. She had passed through Paris, Florence, Rome, Naples. Although it was so many years ago, and she was only a child, she recalled certain things with wonderful accuracy. She asked me about Vienna and Paris, and my studies there. She said that, if she had been a man, she would like to have been a doctor, and when I asked her why answered:

"Because it is such pleasure to know things."

I told her that so I had found it, and that it was difficult, very difficult, to have to give up learning, and take, so to speak, to teaching.

"I wonder," she said, looking at me with her quiet eyes, "that you left Europe. It is only in Europe that they know things. Here we only do them, and if you are not doing things, why, you go about dreaming."

I did not tell her that the reason that made me give up Europe and Klein and all the joy of being among the great men of my profession was my mother's weariness of my

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absence. Neither, moreover, were we rich, and it was necessary that I should set to and turn my knowledge to practical account. I was always on the look out for a house, for our old house in Surrey Hills was too out of the way, and as I sat looking at Marion now and thinking of this, I had a sort of idea that that house would find itself as near to the Undercliffe Road as was compatible with centrality.

Captain Field was talking with my mother, and I did not much notice either him or the young girl Willy. He was a type I knew pretty well, the English officer. The English officer is, of course, only a specialised form of the English gentleman. Captain Field still had the unmistakeable signs on him of a man accustomed to command. It occurred to me, I remember, as I observed him a little, when the conversation between the four of us (Willy sat quite silent, looking and listening) became more general that I would not care to have been his subordinate. He had a certain amount of pleasant manner; he was even courteous; but I remember feeling a sort of instinctive repulsion from him, as if there were something stern and relentless underneath all this.

When we came out, my mother asked me what I thought of Captain Field and Marion?

I said that I thought Miss Turner the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

"Come, Holland," said my mother, "you're not in love with her already, are you?"

I never had a secret from my mother in my life.

"If you mean," I said, "that I would like to marry her, then that is the case."

We went on in silence for a little.

"Did you notice Willy?" she asked at last. "She is a curious girl."

"No," I said, "I did not."

"She is like her mother. Her mother was a blonde, with brown hair and blue eyes. She was a sweet girl and a

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sweeter woman. Marion is more like her father. Her father," she added, gently, "was a convict."

I flushed a little.

"She is what she is," I said, "and I could not wish her otherwise."

"We all thought Willy rather weak, you know—pliable, easily lead! Well, Mr. Turner had been a convict for a short sentence, and had risen to be rich. He met Willy by an accident, and she fell in love with him. Everything was done that could be done to prevent her, but she married him. I was the only one who supported her. At first I had been against the match, but when I saw Willy, and she had told me about things, I saw how mistaken I had been in her. If she could not marry him, she said she would die or kill herself, and I had to believe her. It was quite a revelation. Well, I always supposed it was something of the same sort with Captain Field and her. But John Turner had not his sternness and determination. He was quiet and resolute enough, but there was something so gentle in him. Ah, I never knew the history of that conviction! There was a tale in it, I am sure."

"Is Captain Field stern and determined?" I said, being a little doubtful of her impression, as of my own, and seeking for proof.

She had no proof to give me. It was merely her idea. She returned to Willy—the second Willy this time, however, the child.

"She is wonderfully like her mother. I could almost fancy I saw my old school friend again. But there is something strange about the child, something abnormal. Willy, my Willy, was never the same after her husband's death. It was a terrible shock to her."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"Well, it never was made clear. One day he rode out as usual to look at something on the run, and late in the afternoon his horse came back to the stable without him. They

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searched everywhere for days. Then one of the blacks found him. He was at the bottom of a tank. The water was drained off and the body recovered. It was past recognition. They supposed he had heart disease, or had had sunstroke, and fell off his horse as he was giving it a drink."

"That was very horrible," I said; "it was tragic."

"Yes," she said, "they are a tragic family."

III.

In the course of time I found a house that suited me pretty well, and opened practice. One of the reasons that had made my mother so anxious for me to return was her failing health. Now it was a trouble to me to see her in any way exerting herself to keep house for me. The expense of my studies had been very heavy, and inroads had been made into our, or I should say her, capital to defray it. My great wish was to return this to her—to see her in comfort and happiness. Practically speaking, a marriage with Marion Turner seemed a long way off. She was rich and I was not, and that was a real obstacle, of course, if there were no other. It was necessary to keep a trap and groom, and this, together with the high rent of the house and the wages of the two servants, ran things rather close. Again, I started under a disadvantage. I loathed and abhorred the system of advertising which is resorted to by medical men in the colonies. The colonial medical man is, I am afraid, a rather low type. He is greedy and pushing; he has but one idea — to make money, and to that everything is sacrificed. I too wished to make money, but not by a

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renunciation of all that professional dignity which I admire so much in the medical men of Europe. It was only after repeated expostulation from several of my friends that I inserted an advertisement in the newspapers, stating that I had opened practice. "If you don't," they said, "no one will think that you really practice." All these things, and others of a similar character, kept me during the next few months from seeing much of Miss Turner, but she was ever in my thoughts. I went several times to Lauderdale, and we talked together like old friends. I knew, I say, that she liked me, and that for the present was enough. Captain Field, too, was always polite to me, but my greatest, I mean my openest, friend there was Willy. She seemed to me quite a child, and very lovable. There was, as my mother had noticed, something strange about her, but the strangeness was attractive. She reminded me of Marion's phrase: "She went about dreaming." I was really struck with her. Her eyes had all the clear shifting colours of a shallow sea. Her talk was quaint in the extreme. She had little impulses of feeling—like, dislike, pleasure, grief. Sometimes she would seem to be listening, and once, when I asked her what she was listening to, she answered: "The tree-tops." The moment she heard my footstep in the hall, she would come out from the dining-room or drawing-room to greet me, and lead me in to her sister. On several of these occasions, Marion, Willy, and Margaret, their maid, were sitting in the second veranda, the veranda opposite the dining-room. (The dining-room was to the front and left of the hall; the drawing-room to the right and the whole depth of the house.) Once Miss Turner said to me, smiling, as Willy was putting me into a wicker seat out there:

"Willy can hear your step right through the house. She said it was you before you rang."

Willy was dragging along another chair for herself, so as to sit between her sister and me, and I put out my hand to help her. She paused a moment as she heard this, and

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stood looking, first at her sister, and then at me, and then as it were between us.

"Yes," she said gravely, "I knew you were coming as soon as you got through the garden gate." The garden gate was a good thirty yards off, and, as noted, the house was between it and them.

"Come, Miss Willy," said Margaret, looking up from her work; "that is too far off."

Willy made no reply, but drew the chair to the place she wished and sat down in it.

This Margaret was a noticeable woman in her way. Had I met her casually I should have attempted to enlist her as a nurse. She was made for that. I took her to be about forty. She was comely, and had a quiet kindliness about her, a sort of spontaneous quality that attracted me and made me trust and even a little admire her. She had been with the Fields about a year, and now held the position of a sort of housekeeper and companion and almost mother to the two girls. Nominally she was, I think, Miss Turner's maid. She was not a lady, but she had evidently had some education. I had met the type before, but never in such perfection. She seemed to have a real affection for the two girls, and they for her. Her presence, so quiet and unobtrusive, so respectful of herself in her complete recognition of her own and other people's station, was singularly restful. I liked, and I thought was liked by, her. At least we had a calm cordiality. All my visits to Lauderdale took place under her eyes. I felt that she knew my secret; indeed, I felt that they all did. It was no secret, therefore, but only a simple fact.

Month followed month, and my ultimate success as a doctor seemed to me more and more assured. I knew quite well that there was no man in Sydney, and probably in Australia, who was my superior in certain branches of my profession, and in certain others I probably had no equal. It was not, of course, that there were not plenty of men with an

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intelligence and skill equal, and even perhaps much superior, to mine. It was the mere chance that my intelligence and skill, such as they were, had had the inestimable privilege of being trained by three such men as Klein of Vienna, Druot of Paris, and M'Gregor of Edinburgh. I was abreast of the very best knowledge of my time. A year ago I had won my third gold medal with a thesis on the blood which had extracted from Klein the simple remark that now I was "one of us." It is only foolish to be vain. We are what we are merely through inheritance and the force of circumstances. And yet, I confess, I felt a thrill of pleasure and exultation go through me when I read that five-line scrawl of my stern and beloved master. I looked through the years of bread-winning toil to the time when I too might contribute some real and lasting work to my profession.

I had already, I say, laid the foundation of practical success here in my native city by two surgical operations never before, I believe, attempted in Australia, and both, after a period of anxious waiting, successful. My recognition by the accepted leaders among my colleagues was, I knew, only the prelude to my recognition by an ever-widening lay circle. At this point the Governor's wife heard of my two operations, and her youngest daughter having the same malformation as one of those I had operated on, she wrote to me and asked me for an examination and expression of opinion. This was favorable, and I determined to operate. I was well aware of the gravity of the occasion as regarded my practical success, and I readily confess that I was not without a certain nervousness. Three days before the operation was to come off I went to Lauderdale, and for once found Miss Turner alone. The others had gone out. She gave me tea in the drawing-room, and we sat and talked. Presently I told her about it all. I could not have spoken of it as I spoke of it to her to any one else in the world; no, not even to my mother! I explained the operation to her. Her interest in such things, in every

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thing, indeed, that had to do with knowledge, was very real, helpful, and stimulating. I was sure I could do it, but I did not under-estimate the difficulty and risk. We talked of many things. She soothed and refreshed me. The afternoon passed on into approaching evening. Margaret and Willy came in at the hall door and went up the stairs, talking together. We paused and kept silence for a moment; then looked at one another. Our eyes seemed to make our souls like one. I began to speak to her. I was quite calm, full of security and peace. I knew that she was mine as well as that I was hers. I knew now, and she knew. At last I said quite simply—

"I will not ask you now if you will marry me—if you will be my wife; but when this is over and I have done it, may I come and ask you then?"

We were sitting quite close to each other in the corner where I had seen her sit the first time. We were still looking at one another quietly, deeply. There came a silence, and then we heard the voices of Margaret and Willy and the sound of their steps descending the staircase. The drawing-room door was wide open, and the staircase ran by it with a passage between them. Marion's hands were folded lightly in her lap. I was sitting bent forward with my elbows on my knees and my hands in front of me. I took her hands in mine and pressed them, she returning the pressure. Then (I do not know why) I bent and kissed her cheek, and she kissed mine, both of us drawing back a little and looking at one another. Our eyes seemed to make our souls like one.

The voices ceased, and I heard the sounds of the two crossing over the tiled passage. I rose as they entered. Willy stood still on the threshold. It was dusk, and I could not see her face, as she was in the shadow. Margaret came forward, and I shook hands with her. Willy did not move. I turned to her and held out my hand.

"Well, Willy," I said, "won't you shake hands with me?" (Sometimes she would kiss me.)

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Without a word she turned, and went across the passage and into the dining-room.

"What is the matter?" I asked Margaret.

"I do not know, Dr. Fletcher. It may be one of her whims. She was startled as we came down the stairs. I will go and get her."

"What startled her, Margaret?" asked Marion.

Margaret stopped at the door to answer.

"Something in here, Miss Marion, I think. She looked in across at the big mirror over the mantlepiece, as we were coming down stairs, and got frightened."

When Margaret was gone, Marion rose and found a match box and lit a candle, I lighting another for her. We spoke of the child.

"She is very high-strung," she said. "Little things occasionally quite upset her."

We waited some time, and, as neither of them returned, she excused herself and went into the dining-room to look for them, leaving me alone. In about five minutes she returned.

"She has got a fit of hysterical sobbing," she said, "and would not let me stay. Margaret has taken her up into her room."

"Shall I go to her? Perhaps I could do some good."

As we were speaking, Captain Field entered by the front door; there were greetings, and, on the top of them, farewells; for I could not accept his invitation to stay dinner, and left them. Two days later the operation took place. Everything was favourable, and it was got through successfully. All that now remained was for the little girl to have perfect rest and quiet. In a week the success was ratified, and I knew that the cloud of monetary anxiety had risen, and that I was entering upon a career of practical success that meant happiness and ease for my mother, and no forgotten pride in asking Marion Turner to come to my home and be my wife.

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IV.

CAPTAIN FIELD made no objection to my marriage with his step-daughter. He only stipulated for a six months' engagement, and having informed me that he would, of course, give her a dowry, asked me what ideas I had on the subject? I answered that I wished any money Miss Turner had to be completely and entirely her own, and no more was said on the matter. My mother was what I knew she would be in it all—cordial and kind and even affectionate. She was in very delicate health, and I should have been pleased to have had the marriage take place sooner. Marion, as I always called her now, recognised all that my mother was in herself and to me, and if my mother had (as I felt she had) a certain sort of mild intuitive dislike to my marriage into this family, my Marion's beautiful sweet self seemed soon to have quite overcome it. It was not infrequent now for our house to be brightened with her presence. Often Margaret and Willy came with her, and we had five or rather four o'clock tea together. Marion had always the same steady interest in my work. She liked to see and understand the meaning of my instruments, many of which were very perfect of their kind. I remember one afternoon, in my little laboratory, she asked me to explain to her the name and qualities of many of the chemicals. Everything connected with electricity attracted her, and many of my books did she carry off to read. On several occasions Willy came with her, and took an eager interest in things also. On one occasion they lit on my shelf of poisons, and nothing would do but I must tell all about them. In any other girl I think I should not have altogether liked this sort of curiosity. I have one or two effete feelings in me still, I find. Women doctors never attracted me, but I have known such nice ones, and myself lectured to such nice girls, that *that* prejudice, at least, has

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had its sting drawn. With Marion it seemed a pure curiosity of intelligence, turned in this particular direction (as I thought and was pleased to think) through me.

So the six months' probation, as we called it, passed away, and the day of our marriage grew close. I was very happy at Vienna when Klein took me to work under him, and again at Edinburgh with M'Gregor, but there was a radiancy about this time such as I never knew before. I was quite gay. Everything prospered with me. My great idea all along had been to give up general and only take consulting practice, but this I thought could only come after years and years of hard work. Now I saw it within my reach, and even the chance of leisure and the power to turn to original work (the dream of my life) seemed realisable. I can say nothing of Marion. My father died when I was quite a baby, and I can remember nothing of my parents together, but, as I knew my mother for a perfect mother, I always supposed she was a perfect wife. Marion was a perfect girl, a perfect woman. My knowledge of Greek literature is very slight. I only learned so much of the language as was necessary to me for professional purposes, but I remember a phrase in it —"Nothing in excess"—which I have ever thought should be the motto of our lives. Those who attain to that beautiful poise of all their faculties and duties and desires I call perfect, and thus my mother was perfect, and thus Marion was perfect. Oh clear image, beloved face and form, steadfast eyes and calmly noble features, stay ever before me undimmed as now! Be to me the inspiration of high and sustained effort, the hope of the scene that rises past the chilly mists of death!

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Interpolation.

In the remainder of his story Dr. Fletcher alludes in only a general and undetailed way to the strange event that followed on those related above. A brief account of this event, abstracted from the reports in the newspapers, amounts to this. Dr. Fletcher was one night suddenly summoned at about twelve o'clock by a servant from Lauderdale, who reported that Miss Turner was very ill. On arriving at the house, the doctor was informed by her step-father, Captain Field, that he feared life was extinct. They went upstairs together to Miss Turner's dressing-room, which opened into her bedroom, where they found her maid, Margaret Collins, kneeling beside her as she lay in her night-gown and dressing-gown on the couch under the window. Dr. Fletcher, in his evidence at the inquest, gave it as his opinion that life was at this moment extinct, and had probably been so for at least an hour. His description of the actual state of the body was, he says, unreliable, but it tallied almost exactly with that given by Captain Field and Margaret Collins. On the night of her death, Miss Turner had been last seen alive by Margaret, whom she sent away at about nine o'clock, herself remaining and undressing after her maid had gone. The weather was very close and hot, and for the last two days both she and Miss Field had complained of acute headache. Miss Field had gone to bed immediately after dinner. Miss Turner had a small gas stove in her dressing-room, at which Margaret frequently made her a cup of chocolate. She was fond of sitting and lying in the dressing-room, reading for half an hour or more before going to bed. On this occasion she must have made the chocolate herself. A cup of it almost emptied was found on a chair beside the couch. Captain Field had more than once remonstrated with her for reading so late. She

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would sometimes read till two or three in the morning. On this occasion it was seeing the light from her window, when he came up to bed, that led him to knock at her door, intending to tell her to stop reading. Receiving no reply, he knocked again, and then entered. He found her stretched on the couch in a convulsive attitude, her dress disordered, and the book she had been reading (a medical work, belonging to her engaged husband, Dr. Fletcher) on the floor, doubled back. At first he thought she was asleep in a sort of trance. Her eyes were open and had a remarkable sunken appearance. On attempting to waken her, he found her hands and face were warm, but the flesh looked heavy and livid. He went and awoke Margaret, and sent one of the maids off to summon Dr. Fletcher. At Dr. Fletcher's request, Dr. Carpenter, who lived near, was also summoned. On examination he considered that life had been extinct for several hours. Both of them were of opinion that the death was of a suspicious nature, and Dr. Carpenter took away the chocolate cup from which Miss Turner had drunk. The *post mortem* was performed by the Government Medical Officer the next day. The vessels of the head and lungs were slightly congested, but there was no suffusion in the brain. The blood was perhaps more fluid than it ought to have been, and he had notified one or two faint, bloody patches in the intestines. The stomach was a little deranged, but from obviously natural causes. Under the circumstances of the state of health of the deceased at the time, he reported, there was nothing in the *post mortem* evidence to point with any conclusiveness to poison, but he wished to draw attention to the fact that the alkaloids of such poisons as morphia, prussic, strychnia and nicotina were practically undetectable. The Government Analyst confirmed this, and reported, further, that the chocolate in the cup was quite pure. Margaret Collins was submitted to a very severe examination, as being the last person who had seen Miss Turner alive, but her evidence was generally

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considered to be in the highest degree satisfactory, leaving no room for suspicion. The jury for a long time were doubtful whether to return a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, or to declare the case as being in their opinion one of suicide or accidental death, though how she had procured the poison or what the poison was did not appear. They ended with returning a verdict perfectly open.

II

1.

"I DO not think I can ever be the same man again that I was. The mainspring of my life seems broken. I am surprised that I am able to perform my duties in even the perfunctory way I do. Certainly I have had my thoughts turned very seriously to the question of religion. The tender and pure piety of my mother always formed an object of my very deepest respect. Now I cannot fail to give it my profound admiration, and I sincerely wish that I could imitate it to the full. The truth is that, thus far, I have been so completely taken up with the acquisition of knowledge and skill in my profession that I have paid little attention to the actual truths of religion. My mother, I can see now, has perceived this, and has all along been giving me a silent and gentle reproach. The shock of late events has acted upon her most deleteriously, and I cannot hide from myself the fact that I am in danger of losing her. What a prospect is my life to me! I am young and strong, and there are, in all probability, many years before me; and all is utterly weary and spiritless, like one of those monotonous expanses of treeless salty mud, through which the

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sluggish river of existence, under clouded heavens, without sun, or moon, or star, drags itself to the oblivion of the ocean of death. I can write no more."

I remember well the occasion when this was penned—how I was sitting in my study at my desk, attempting to reply to a long and anxious letter from the husband of a patient whom I had sent up to Katoomba to the Blue Mountains for change of air—how in the dull and closing light of a rainy autumn day, my jaded thoughts, unable to direct themselves onto their proper subject, turned selfishly to my own woe, so long repressed even to myself, and, almost unconsciously, I began to write. And need I be ashamed to confess that, at the close, I bowed my head onto my arms on the table and sobbed and wept? I never remember crying since I was a boy of seven or eight, when I suffered a great injustice at school.

My fears of my mother's health were only too just. Nothing was more remarkable than the power with which she prepared me for our parting. We were never so close before, and the quiet intensity of her conviction in the goodness and love of God, and of the happiness of a future life, where we should advance to new spiritual developments with those we loved, made a profound impression on me. During the period of our long separation, when I was prosecuting my studies in Europe, I had, quite unconsciously, drifted away from the religious beliefs which she had so simply and calmly made a part of my early being, like my appreciation of her favourite music, or of the quiet taste of her manner of decorating the house. The very flowers she loved most, a sprig of scarlet genanium, a few heads of mignonette, a bunch of violets, had all the world over, seemed to me as perennial memories of her and of her peaceful, lovely, yet courageous womanhood. The people with whom I lived in Europe, the very atmosphere I breathed, made up one big denial of her "old-world" creeds, and though I never discussed them with others, they had slowly relaxed their hold on me. This she had, as I have said, remarked, but she had

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never spoken of it to me. Her method of influencing people had always been by her silent personality. Now, just before her prostration with weakness, she told me that she had never been so happy except in the year or two just before I left Europe, and in the short period of her married life with my father. And this was an extraordinary thing of her to say, although she really felt it.

I still kept up some slight intercourse with Captain Field and his household for obvious reasons, not to mention that I had a real attraction to poor little Willy and Margaret as the only remaining portions of my lost love-dream. Both of them, I felt, clung to me, and in a measure, I clung to them. The dreadful end of the one we had all loved, the still more dreadful and baffling mystery which seemed in some strange manner to weigh in special upon us three, drew us together. On the day when my mother's prostration suddenly came, I was full of anxiety about getting a suitable nurse for her, and late that afternoon, stopping for a few moments on my rounds in the buggy for a cup of tea at Lauderdale, I incidentally spoke to Margaret about it. We were on the first veranda, the balcony just outside the drawing-room, looking over the greenery of the garden with its shrubs and trees, and the windings of the harbour beyond. At such times now I sometimes felt the presence of Marion in a most remarkable way. She seemed almost among us; and if, as might be, she was only, as it were awaiting me in that other life where I should some day meet her, why might not her influence permeate to me here? I was thinking about this when Willy got up and went inside and upstairs for some reason or other. I continued thinking without taking any notice, as I finished my cup of tea. Then Margaret began to address me. She spoke with her usual simplicity and calmness, tinctured at once by self-respect and deference. She told me that Captain Field had decided several weeks ago to send Miss Willy to school. He thought the companionship of girls of her own age would do her good. He

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was afraid of her becoming ill. She had indeed been very depressed of late and did strange things. She had developed the regular habit of talking and walking in her sleep, and several times she had been a little light-headed. They had not liked to bother me about it. Captain Field had very kindly offered Margaret to continue her place as housekeeper in the changed condition of affairs which was likely to take place shortly. But she had preferred, after thinking it all over, to go elsewhere. She was leaving immediately. She had done a little nursing in the past, in England, in London. Did I think there was any opening for her as a nurse in Sydney? She liked the work.

I was really astonished by the news she gave me in this quiet and discreet manner, and had just begun to reply to her, when Captain Field came in, and, passing along the passage and straight out into the verandah, greeted me. He sat down in an easy-chair by the wall; Margaret poured him out a cup of tea, and I opened on the subject at once. I told him about my mother, and how I wanted to get a reliable nurse for her, and that I should be only too glad to get Margaret. He acquiesced, saying:

"She can go when she pleases—Margaret is her own mistress."

Then came a short silence, and he raised his head and added:

"I am about to marry again, and I think it will be better for Willy's health if she goes to a boarding school for a time, and Dr. Carpenter thinks the same."

His manner was peculiar, repellant, almost insulting. I was puzzled and not a little annoyed. I rose and said good-bye. As I reached the hall door I was startled by feeling a light touch on my arm, and, turning sharply, saw Margaret.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Fletcher," she said, breathing a little quickly, but speaking quite collectedly and distinctly. "But when shall I come?"

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"As soon as you can, Margaret," I answered.

"To-night?"

"If that will not . . . " I paused.

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "That will be all right," and so we agreed about it.

When I reached home I found my mother in a dead faint and the two servants in terror, thinking she was dead or dying. The faint was succeeded by a sleep that was almost a stupor, and this lasted till Margaret's arrival.

II.

It was soon clear to me that the end was close at hand. My mother spoke but little from this time onward. Margaret's nursing was admirable, and yet I fancied from the look that came over my mother's face when she first saw who was tending on her, that she felt some repulsion. The unhappy memories conjured up were enough to explain this, and perhaps I should at all costs have prepared her for the appearance of Margaret. On the other hand the return to consciousness was rather sudden, and Margaret came right in upon it. This was followed by a relapse, from which the efforts of my colleague and myself were quite unable to rouse her. Then, suddenly, again, at about breakfast time she recovered herself, sat up and sent Margaret for me. I came, and at a gesture from her, Margaret withdrew. The bed was by the open window looking out over the creeper-covered veranda into the garden and distant harbour. The sunlight came in by the two folds of the open glass door at the foot of the bed. My mother was quite calm, beautifully

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serene, although very weak. I sat beside her and she took my hand.

"I am going, my boy," she said, "I am going now. I am happy enough. Only one thing troubles me. Who did it? who killed her? I shall know in another hour; but you here on earth, my poor boy, you here on earth? Find out; punish—punish"

She made as if to kiss me. I bent my cheek to her and she kissed it. Her eyes were half closed, and I cannot tell when the last breath came.

Presently I got up and went and stood in the sunlight, leaning against the side of the doorway and thought of her. I recalled her last words, but attached little or no meaning to them. Then I turned and looked at her again before I went away to my study to sit and sorrow alone.

When I returned to the room I found Margaret there. Everything was done well. My mother lay back on the smoothed bed, her hands crossed on her breast holding a bunch of flowers. The room was cleared and in order, yet with just that delicate charm that she so loved.

Right through that trouble Margaret was thoughtful and kind beyond expression. She managed everything in the house. Sometimes I talked with her and always with pleasure. Once I even thought of asking her to make a part of my lonely meals, though the proposal seemed somewhat strange to me when I came to consider it. She filled the gap left in the home in a way I should have thought impossible. We sometimes spoke together of my mother and of Marion, and her perfect appreciation of them was very comforting to me. On one occasion I mentioned to her certain circumstances in connection with some of my work and her intelligence supplied useful hints with regard to the management of the difficulty. Thus I was cowardly enough to postpone again and again the settlement of her position in the house, fearing that it meant her loss, until at last I felt that, in common justice to her, this could not con-

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tinue, and one evening, requesting her to follow me, broached the subject to her in the study. I asked her if she still wished to take up nursing, or if she would care to retain the position of housekeeper in my home? She replied, that she would be very pleased to remain where she was if I was sure that she was of service to me. I said that I was sure. And she added that, if on certain occasions I required her as a nurse, she would be perfectly ready to undertake it. This was exactly what I should have wished, and I thanked her cordially and proposed what seemed to me suitable terms, which she accepted, after allowing her delicate protest against their supposed over-liberal nature to be overruled. About this time I learned incidentally that poor little Willy had been sent to a boarding school, and that Captain Field had married again. A colleague at the hospital informed me of the fact, and he also told me something about the lady, who was a Mrs. Milnes, the widow of one of the partners in the firm of Johnstone and Milnes, the printers and booksellers. This somewhat surprised me as I had never met or even heard of her at Lauderdale.

One morning on my arrival at the hospital I found among my patients, as a new arrival, a young man who had received what I could not doubt were two shot wounds. He had been picked up somewhere the night before by some kind stranger, who had had him conveyed to the hospital and left him there. The wounds were not in reality serious, but he had lost a good deal of blood and was very weak. He had been struck on one of the ribs on the left side and the bullet had glanced off into his arm, passing through the flesh and out. Another bullet had gone through the arm on the other side, abrading the bone. He gave his name as David Stuart, and certified that he had been shot at by a man who had attempted to rob him on the cliffs by Bondi, and whom he had attacked. I took a liking to him, and several little scraps of conversation that I had with him not only interested but piqued and attracted me to him. When he left the hospital I asked him

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to come to see me, any evening before eight, and presently he took me at my word, and we drank tea together and had a very pleasant talk. The attraction to one another seemed mutual, and when in a little I found that he had made up his mind to stay in Sydney, at least for a time, and take up his press-work there, I went so far as to ask him if he would care to take up his abode with me. We readily arranged matters, and I congratulated myself on having procured as my friend, and in some sort companion, one of the nicest men I had ever met.

III.

I DID not for a moment think that Stuart's stay with me would be permanent. There was something essentially restless and nomadic about him. His nature was a most singular admixture of calm and nervous force. Ordinarily so quiet, with so limpid and soothing a personal influence, there was latent in him, I found, a distinctly high-strung element. I suppose it is much the same with myself. And yet he supplemented me in a manner that showed me, beyond a doubt, how great a part dissimilarity plays in mutual attraction. To him nothing seemed decided. He would admit of nothing as being proved beyond question. His great idea was analysis. Everything, he used to say, will sooner or later be broken up into its component parts. What is genius? The unanalysed! What is love? The unanalysed! So soon as our powers of analysis are commensurate with these phenomena they will lose their chief influence on us. His talk was very animating and helpful to me. And I now, I found, applied ideas to my own experience and knowledge which I should never have dreamed of doing on my own account. I

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will confess that many beliefs, and some of them really cherished beliefs, which I had held, as Stuart used to say, in solution were now precipitated and made manifest in their true untenable shapes. For a long time, however, I shirked discussing with him in any direct manner the two strongest factors in my past spiritual life—my love for my mother and my love for Marion. But one evening after dinner, chatting together in the study, an hour of complete expansion came to both of us. He, no less than I, had a love story, and an amazing one it was. The woman he had loved was, it appeared, the notorious Madeline Brown, the Melbourne actress, who was mysteriously murdered not so many months ago. I could not refrain from expressing a certain sense of repulsion which I had to her as a type. I had never met her, but I had heard things about her which, together with what I had read in the newspapers, led me to look upon her as nothing much more than a loose woman. The tale he told was from a totally different point of view. To him she was an incarnation of beauty with a certain element of genius and passion. His justification of her immorality I could not agree to, but his contention that she was in no wise common or coarse seemed to me, as his terrible narrative proceeded, at least feasible. At first I could scarcely credit the *rôle* taken in it all by Canon Hildyard, the well-known Melbourne preacher, until I grasped the explanation of the murderous vengeance worked out on him as on her by her husband, and Stuart's patient and skilful tracking out of the murderer, ending in that weird duel under the cliffs in Bondi. Thus, too, I had made clear to me the real significance of those shot wounds.

"It would seem," said Stuart, ending, "as if every one took the view of her taken by those two brute beasts who destroyed her and themselves. I knew and loved and reverenced a side in her which transfigures all she did with beauty and purity. I could never have rested—I could never have ceased striving—until I had run to earth those

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two fiends who would have dragged her down into their own venomous degradation." He spoke with a savage intensity of purpose of which I had not suspected him to be capable.

Then came a pause, and, by some correlation of thought or ideas which escaped me, I suddenly saw myself in the next room, sitting on the bed-side, gazing at my mother as she took my hand. I heard her words again; I heard the very sound of them:—"*I am happy enough. Only one thing troubles me. Who did it? Who killed her? I shall know in another hour; but you here on earth, my poor boy, you here on earth? Find out; punish punish*"

I got up in extreme agitation and began pacing the room. The words were sounding in my ears like a shrill, clear tune, burning across my brain like fiery letters of white light. How strange that they had never struck me in this way before. I could not comprehend it. A keen desire to tell all this to him—to Stuart—to my friend—to him who had aroused all these new feelings in me—took possession of me. It was almost like a confession. I seemed to have neglected my duty. I ought to suffer a severe penance.

"Listen," I said, sitting down and covering my face with my hands for a few moments to gather my thoughts, "listen. I want to tell you something, too."

He was very gentle and soothing to me. He tried to quieten me.

"You are going to tell me about Miss Turner," he said. "I know it. I heard and read about it."

"Just," I said, "as I heard and read about Madeline Brown, and what worth was that? It is something quite different that I want to tell you now."

"Tell on," he said.

Then I began and sketched out the events that had led up to that strange and terrible scene of suicide and death. The fascination, the very secret power of his own analysis was on me. I faced it all, as I had never faced it before. I laid bare every fact. I turned a piercing vision onto the

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words and acts of all of us concerned in the drama. I unravelled the tangled threads. A sort of frenzy had seized on me. I felt like a bloodhound that had lit on the scent and snuffed up the flavour of blood-drops trickling from the wounded fugitive.

As I finished, and we two sat there, staring at one another in the ghastly light of the guttering candle and of the early dawn, two keen white faces, the same thought had hold of us both. I knew it, and he knew it, and each knew the other knew it.

I broke the silence with a great effort.

"Did you," I said, "ever think of it before?"

"Yes," he said, "I did."

"To me," I answered, "it has come like a revelation. Can it be true! The motive, what is the motive?"

"That woman," he answered slowly, "loves you. I do not think that she would stick at anything. She believes profoundly in this life. She is perfect of her kind. She excites my admiration."

"But," I said, "justice! To punish—to punish, how shall I do that?"

"Wait," he answered, "and watch."

IV.

THE idea that had now come into my mind oppressed me dreadfully. I could get no sleep. It amazed me to see how unchanged Stuart's manner was to Margaret. For me the sight of her was unendurable. From the first he and she had got on well together. They were simple and cordial to one another. It had not struck me before, but she had accepted his arrival in the house, and the inevitably great

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subordination of herself which it entailed, in a very nice manner. Now I shunned her as much as I could, and when one morning at breakfast Stuart told me that he would have to go to Melbourne for a week or more on business, I felt almost cowardly enough to entreat him not to leave me alone with her. However, I overcame that, and we parted with two firm hand-clasps at the railway station, where I drove with him in the cab. We had not said a word about the great matter since that night. Perplexity and doubt had been upon me as well as the oppression of horror and revenge. I felt miserably shattered. A presentiment of evil and misfortune tortured me.

I had a professional visit to attend to in the town that afternoon; but I felt I could not keep it. I took a tram, and walked from the terminus mournfully home. I came in by the side entrance up to the house, and sat down in the study and tried to read. I could not.

I got up and went out into the balcony, standing irresolutely considering; and then, urged by what impulse I know not, stepped down onto the grass and began examining the beds of flowers under the veranda. My study was the room behind what used to be my mother's bedroom and which was now Margaret's. As I moved along, half thinking to myself, half examining the plants, I came opposite the open window, and was aware of the sound of two voices. One was Margaret's; the other startled me; it was so strange and yet so familiar. I stopped short. The veranda all along this side was covered with the dense folds of a luxuriant passion-flower. Margaret came close by the window; I could see her dress at the left side of it. The other person was right in the corner, hedged in by the bed and the two walls. Before I knew it I was in the midst of their talk.

"Will you speak lower?" said Margaret sternly.

"No," said the other, "I won't, I won't, I won't! You're false; you know you're false! Keep away from me!"

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I suddenly recognised the voice. It was Willy's.

"Will you be obedient?" said Margaret, as sternly but more imperiously than before.

"Keep away!" cried Willy. "You're false. You've deceived me. You have got him for yourself. He knows nothing of me at all. You're lying. I've learned all about it. But you shan't do it. I won't let you. He belongs to me. I did it."

"Willy," said Margaret with a swift change to gentleness, "you are wrong. Dear, sweet child, you are wrong."

"I am *not* wrong. I did it. I killed her, and you are going to get him. I know quite well you want him. I can see it in your eyes, you false thing!"

Everything went backwards as I heard Margaret saying:

"Hush, hush, dear. Dear Willy, dear Willy——"

I nearly fell over. Then, like a man in one of those horrible dreams that are worse than nightmares, I went along the veranda to the steps opposite the glass doors and mounted. One of the doors was open, and, as I entered it, I stood face to face with Margaret. I realised vaguely that Willy was close behind her.

We stared at one another like two ghosts. Then she smiled in a horrible way, and after an effort, said:

"Willy is here, Dr. Fletcher: she has come to see you."

There was a long silence and then I said:

"I heard."

She raised her eyebrows a little.

"What did you hear?"

"All."

"The child is not right in her mind. She has a delusion that . . . that . . . "

"That she killed her sister?"

"No," said Willy suddenly, "no, no!"

She came forward beside and a little in front of the other. I stood facing them both.

"I understand," I said. "It is all clear to me now——

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You," I went on to Willy, "took some poison from one of the jars in the laboratory. It was morphia muriate. Who told you to take it? Who told you to take morphia muriate, and how much to take? Answer!" I caught her by the wrists, looking directly into her eyes.

She quailed, and began working her lips piteously like a child, half crying.

"It wasn't me," she said, "it wasn't me. It was Margaret told me."

"You took it that afternoon when you came with your sister, and I went out into the garden with her and left you looking at a book on the study table! You went back and took it?"

"Yes," she said, and began whimpering.

I tightened my hold on her wrists and shook her a little.

"And how did you give it her?"

"I put it in the chocolate. Margaret gave it me in a little paper."

"And your sister drank it?"

"Yes."

"You saw her drink it? Did she drink it all? Was the cup full?"

"She drank it all. It was only a little."

"And what did you do then?"

Her eyes wandered from mine, then came back to mine again, and she burst into a fit of laughter. I held her for a few moments and then let her go. She was mad. She began to sing in snatches, and stare about as animals do after flies in a room or cage. I turned to Margaret. We looked at one another. I did not know what to say.

"She is quite mad now," she said at last. "She has run away from school. I saw how she was the moment she came in."

"You are a murderess," I said.

From pale she turned to livid as she answered in a low, suppressed voice:

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"You wrong me, Dr. Fletcher."

"One thing alone astounds me," I said; "your motive. Why did you kill her?"

"I did not kill her."

"*Have* her killed, then. It is the same thing."

"Do you credit this half-witted thing?"

She glanced aside at Willy, who was now squatted on the floor making hideous faces, slobbering herself, and added, "——this drivelling lunatic?"

"I do."

"Why," she answered, "you know quite well that what she says is not true. She said a moment ago that her sister drank all the chocolate. The cup was found half full."

"Why don't you remind me that it was also analysed and found pure?"

"It was."

"You yourself washed out that cup as she lay unconscious in convulsions, and filled it again half full from the chocolate pot?"

"There was no chocolate pot. The chocolate was always made in the cup by pouring boiling water into it. You are wrong, Dr. Fletcher. I am innocent altogether."

"Tell me," I said, "would you marry me? If I were to tell you that I loved you, and desired you for my wife, would you marry me?"

"I would not. I respect and esteem you, Dr. Fletcher, but I would not marry you."

"You mean if I believed you guilty of this? But if I believed you were innocent?"

She shook her head.

"No, not then," she said, "never!"

"You have used that poor child's sick fancy for me," I said, "to work her sister's death. It is diabolical. But what did you want?"

"I never did this! I am quite innocent of it! If Willy poisoned her sister in a mad fit of jealousy, hoping that you

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might love her and marry her some day, I am not responsible for it."

"But you knew of it?"

"I will not deny that."

"And yet you held your tongue?"

"I could do no good by speaking. She was not responsible for her actions. She has been mad before—as bad as this." And she glanced at the poor creature moaning and scratching herself on the floor like a monkey.

"If I can bring this home to you," I said, "I will."

She turned her face away; then, looking at me suddenly, with a look of the most astonishing affection, said:

"I loved you! yes, I loved you, and some day you may do me justice, for I would have been your slave and been thankful. Some day you may do me justice."

She bowed her head slightly, and went out, leaving me alone with Willy, and the dreadful close of the love story of my life.

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DICK WARD.

(MR. SHORT'S REMINISCENCES.)

I.

I MET Dick Ward first in Sydney, at Mrs. Jordan's. Mrs. Jordan kept a boarding-house in Philip Street, and it was a good one. Ward was an Englishman, but he had been five or six years in the colonies, and as all that time he had been up in the bush on a cattle station, I always looked upon him as a fellow Australian. He had left England on account of his health. I think he was naturally consumptive, and when he got two or three severe colds, which ended in congestion of the lungs and a regular winter cough, he wisely determined, as he put it, to quit. He quitted, and came out to Sydney in a sailing vessel, and then went straight up onto the Blue Mountains and took work on a cattle station. The cough left him. He became well and strong, and it was only an accident that brought him down to Sydney. He broke his leg above the knee as he was droving some cattle. His horse swerved and struck him against a tree. Sydney was almost as near as any other town with a hospital in it, and easier of access through the railway, and, a friend persuading him, to Sydney they came. The long drive in a buggy to the nearest railway station had worn him out, and the resetting of the broken limb was a painful operation. Nonetheless, the moment he could get about at all he left the

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hospital, and a fellow-patient directed him to Mrs. Jordan's. Mrs. Jordan was a rather smart widow with an only daughter, and she prided herself on the style kept up by her boarding-house. And it was, as I have said, a good one. Our name for her amongst ourselves was "Mama." The woman had too many airs and graces and little ceremonies to please me, and I never took to that way she had of making believe that she was a sort of lady hostess and all the rest of us merely fellow guests. Sometimes it was a nuisance, and the endless "society manners" she affected made me sick. Effie, the daughter, was a pretty silky sort of girl with taking ways. I call her silky, because she always gave me that impression. Her hair was light brown with a touch of gold in it, and that was silky. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were silky. She had something silky about her skin, and her dress always seemed to have something silky in it. I am not a good hand at describing people, and perhaps that does not give much of an impression of her. Friends or old boarders used constantly to be coming to the house to see the Jordans, and often they stopped to dinner. Several of these were apparently rich and stylish people, and Mrs. Jordan was always very pleased to see them. She was polite and affable to everyone. That was her way, a part of her "business," so to speak, but in her heart she thought a good deal of herself, and so did Effie. Her husband had been a captain in one of the regiments that were out here in the old convict days, and he had (she *said*) distinguished himself in some war somewhere. He was much, oh very much, older than she, and, judging from the oil portrait of him in the dining-room and from his photographs and the enamel painting of him in the drawing-room, he must have been a supercilious old fool. Mrs. Jordan always spoke of him as "The Captain." Effie was a good girl, as girls go, and far more real than "Mama," but she had the same family pride in her, as I have said, and she was a bit of a butterfly. Among the visitors who came to the house was a

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man called Milnes. He was the junior partner in the firm of Johnstone and Milnes, the large stationers, booksellers, and printers. He was a stupid sort of man to my mind, empty-headed, with all his brains on his back. He thought he was good-looking, and played the fop, wearing an eye-glass now and then, and mouthing his words with the English fashionable drawl. He was inclined to be sweet on Effie, and this evidently pleased "Mama." I do not think it pleased Effie. I do not think she troubled herself much about it, at least at first. She was a capital mimic when she liked, and she took him off to me once or twice really splendidly, screwing up her eye and twisting her face and giving us his drawl. *I* thought him a snob. For what has an Australian got to do with imitating foppish Englishmen who are quite played out? Effie and I were rather good friends. I was not in the least sweet on her. She was not in my style. She was rather what I call a "Sunday-clothes girl," or a "do-the-block girl," and that seems to me useless and empty. But sometimes, when we were alone together she would be genuine and sensible, and these little talks were pleasant enough and made us sort of familiars.

It was just a few weeks before Dick Ward came that I got an idea into my head that something was going wrong with Mrs. Jordan's affairs. I could not see what it was, but there was a sort of air about things as if she was getting embarrassed. The times were hard, and she had had a long run of ill-luck as regarded her boarders. I had been with her, off and on, from three to four years, and I never saw her house so empty and for so long. In the city, in my own line of business, things were close enough in all conscience, and I suppose that, as Mrs. Jordan had a large connection with people in the country, who came to her when they were down in Sydney for a holiday and who now stopped at home, that was the way things pressed on her. Then Ward came, and I got to know him at once. I id not get to know strangers easily, and Mrs. Jordan's impressive introductions as of two

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parties to a mutual friendship did not usually make much difference. In Ward's case, I daresay his trouble with his leg, and the nice quiet ways he had, helped us both on. Mrs. Jordan was kind to him, and so was Effie. He seemed struck with Effie. I remember, quite at the beginning, catching him following her about the room with his eyes with an interested, pleased look. Our rooms were close to each other, and we got into the way of sitting in them together in the evenings, or on Sundays, talking and smoking. His name, "Dick Ward," seemed to me exactly made for him, though I cannot quite tell why. When Mrs. Jordan introduced us to one another I did not catch it, and afterwards, when we got talking together, I asked him what it was, and he said simply:

"My name's Dick Ward."

I always thought of him as Dick Ward, and I always shall.

We all liked him. There were four or five others in the house at the time, men and women, and they all liked him. He bore his confinement so well, so quietly and patiently, and he spoke so nicely when anyone spoke to him. He used to say funny things, too, always quietly, and they set you off laughing to yourself, and kept you at it for long. It was really pretty to hear him and Effie making fun of one another. She was a good deal with him, I could see, and one afternoon, as I was coming back from business and taking a stroll through the Domain, I found them sitting together on a bench, talking and laughing. This was, I knew, the first time he had gone out. His leg (it was the left) was still much swollen all the way down, and he had to wear a slipper. They did not see me at first, and I took a good look at them. At that moment she was sitting still, smiling, her hands in her lap, looking in front of her out over the sunny grass and trees. He was lounging back smoking, looking up at her in a curious way—sort of contemplating her. Then it struck me that he was really sweet on her, and I wondered what would be the end of it?

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II.

Often after then I saw little signs pass between them, as if they had an understanding. He never spoke of her to me nor did I to him. What surprised me was that I could see Mrs. Jordan had observed them, and yet did not make the least effort to stop anything, although she knew quite well that Dick Ward had no money or position or anything. And she did more. She made a fuss about him from time to time, and got Effie to make a fuss, and at last I noticed that she always did this when Milnes came, and that it annoyed him. One evening in particular, when Dick Ward had hurt himself a little during the day and was in pain whenever he moved, she and Effie made so much of him that Milnes got quite angry. Afterwards I came by chance into the drawing-room, where he and Mrs. Jordan were sitting together talking, and I caught an expression of hers that astonished and impressed me.

"Oh yes," she was saying, "he is taking a station on the Logan."

I went out with the certainty in my mind that they had been talking about Dick Ward, and it struck me all at once that "Mama" wanted to use him as a sort of stalking-horse for Milnes. I never spoke of this to Dick Ward, or of anything connected with it, and about a month later he thought he was well enough to go back onto the station for light work, and we parted. That evening at dinner I thought Effie looked as if she had been crying, and she was so feverishly gay that I took it for a certainty that she was pretty sorry he had gone. To myself, too, I thought there had been, and was, more between these two than met the eye.

Three or four months passed, and it was more and more apparent to me that Milnes had serious intentions as regards Miss Effie; and, sure enough, one evening in the

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drawing-room when I was alone with "Mama," their engagement was pleasantly confided to me.

"They will be married about Easter," said Mrs. Jordan, with her most unctuous smile. "And then, I think, Mr. Short, that I shall be giving up the house and retiring into private life." She was quite jocularly pathetic about it.

I said a little in the congratulatory way, but what I had in my mind was, "And what about Dick Ward?"

It was now February, and Easter came late in April. I could not, of course, say anything to Effie, but I was really disgusted with her, and a coldness sprang up between us. Sometimes I thought I was wrong; for what did I know of what passed between them? A few weeks later I knew. I received a letter from him. We had been good friends and were sorry to part, and had promised to write to one another now and then and not lose the chance of seeing one another if it was possible. Several letters had passed between us, but with nothing noteworthy in them. This was not the case with this letter, which ran somehow as follows:—

"MY DEAR SHORT,—

"I am writing this time to ask a great favour of you. I'll put it straight out and say that I want you to give me some news of Miss Jordan. Where is she? Is she well? What is she doing? You must not wonder at this, and I will tell you straight out again why I ask. I have written to her again and again during the last two months, but can get no reply. This is a great trouble to me, and *if I can't get news of her from you, I must come down to Sydney myself.* I don't know what you think of this, but I ask you to *keep it to yourself* whatever it is, and I think you'll understand why. I can't write of anything else just now, and it's bad enough to write this. Let me hear from you soon, there is a good fellow, and you will be doing a real kindness to

"Yours always truly,

"DICK WARD."

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It was "bad enough" to write the reply to this, but I wrote it and told him exactly what had happened. I did not receive any answer to my letter, and two weeks after Easter Milnes and Effie were married.

III.

MRS. JORDAN, as she had said, gave up the boarding-house, and I went elsewhere. The Milnes' set up in a nice villa in the Glebe, and after a bit I went to see them there. The house and everything was quite stylish, and so was Mrs. Milnes. She had changed wonderfully in the few months since I had seen her. She was quite the young fashionable married woman now, and had mawkish affected ways that I could not put up with. She was always smiling and laughing, but neither smile nor laugh were genuine. She asked me to stay to dinner; but I would not; nor yet would I come another day. I wanted to see her once—that was all. A few days after that, I saw her in her smart little Victoria with Milnes, driving away from the warehouse. She had an impatient, disgusted sort of look on her face, and he was making affected movements, grinning and staring about him with his eye-glass like a monkey. I remembered when she mimicked him just as he was now, and smiled to myself pretty grimly. I never saw Mrs. Jordan. I did not know where she went, and I did not want to know, for I believed she had sold her daughter and used an honest, simple-minded man as her tool for it, and I only hoped she had got her deserts in being shunted off to some outlandish place by herself. This comes of having family pride and a played-out English gentleman as your husband. It makes

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you and your daughter into a couple of rogues. I would sooner suffer, I thought, with Dick Ward on the station than with Mrs. Milnes in the villa.

I wrote to him again shortly after this, asking for news, and saying nothing about the Jordans, but no answer came. A few months later, however, in August, I had business that took me up pretty close to him, and I determined I would go and see him. The station was fifteen miles or so out from the little township, so I took a horse for the day and rode over. I really wanted to see him, and they told me at the hotel that he was still there. But I lost my way, and, instead of getting there by midday, did not turn up till close on sunset. I asked the first person I met—a lean, brown, old bushman, chopping and carting wood out in the home paddock—if Dick Ward was about anywhere?

"Dick Ward?" said he, stopping, leaning on his axe and wiping his brow with the back of his hand. "Dick Ward's up at the house. He's ill. They think bad of him, too, I heard say. He's got 'gestion on the lungs."

I learned a few particulars and also how to get straight to the house, and rode on at a trot. At the house I introduced myself to a servant girl, and was led in and presented to the lady, to whom I also introduced myself. She seemed glad to hear I was a friend of Ward's, and told me he was ill, very ill. They had had him removed from the bachelors' hut. Then she led me into the little room where he was. I shall never forget standing there and looking at him. The poor fellow was asleep. He was a perfect wreck, and his face had a still, grey hue about it, whose meaning I guessed too well. I turned to the lady and we looked at one another. The same thought was in us both. It was bitterly cold, with a sharp west wind, and the little fire on the great big cold white-washed hearth did not properly warm the room. I asked in a whisper if I might sit by him? She assented, and went out and left us alone. A candle, lit, flared on the dressing-table.

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Presently he awoke. He did not recognise me at first, but when he did, was not apparently surprised.

"Ah, Short," he said, "it's you! Have you come from her?"

I shook my head.

"She'd no message?" he asked wonderingly. "She did not send you?"

I answered nothing.

"Is she married?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. But do not talk about it. Do not talk. Wait." He spoke with great effort.

"No," he said in a whisper, "I'll talk a little now; I shan't be able to presently. I am going."

He was so quiet and patient that it wrung my heart. He lay still, his eyes half closed.

"There's a desk there," he said, "in the box."

I saw a big wooden box like a seaman's chest on one side of the fire-place, and went and opened it. I found the desk —one of those small, flimsy, velvet-pad desks, such as new chums bring out from England—now old and ricketty. I sat with it on my knees.

"Open it," he said.

I opened it, and, following his glance, lifted up the lid of the upper compartment. There was a bundle of letters in one corner. I guessed what he wanted, drew it out, and gave it him. His weak fingers failed to undo the string that tied it up, so I undid it for him. It was pathetic to see the way he passed the letters, the thin letters, each in its envelope, through his hands, touching them so gently. When he had gone through them all, he drew them together again in a packet and held it up to me.

"Burn," he said.

"Burn them?"

He nodded.

I went with them to the fire and burned them, waiting till they were all consumed. When I came back he was lying

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with his eyes closed, his long, thin, bleached fingers pressed onto one envelope that he had retained. Presently he seemed to notice me, and his fingers clutched round it. He held it up to me.

"Give it her," he said.

I took the envelope. It contained something more bulky than a letter—flowers, I thought.

"Look at it," he said, with a faint, strange smile.

I saw that he meant me to look at what was in the envelope. It was an unused envelope and unclosed. I took out of it a tress of hair. It was light brown, but the candle-light and the fire-light playing upon it gave it little sheens of gold. It was soft and silky, tied with a piece of deep red ribbon—her favourite colour.

"It is beautiful!" he whispered to himself; "I believed her."

I put it back in the envelope.

"I am to give it her?" I asked.

He nodded slightly.

"Tell me," he whispered, "is she happy?"

"No," I said, "no!"

"Ah!" he sighed, "I'm sorry."

He died that night, and, in accordance with his wish, he was buried under a wattle-tree a little way from the house. He had been quiet and patient from the beginning, they said. Of late, however, they had noticed a change in him. He had grown listless and careless of himself. He had caught a chill one bitter, rainy night, and had never recovered. Everyone seemed to like him. I rode away from the station with a sad heart.

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IV.

Curiously enough, the second day I was in Sydney I met Mrs. Milnes. It was in Macquarie Street, and not fifty yards from the seat where I had seen her that first afternoon with Dick Ward. She was in her Victoria alone, driving down the avenue towards the gate of the Botanical Gardens. I signalled to her to stop. She recognised the signal, and spoke to her coachman, who drew up. I came across the road to her. We exchanged greetings, and I said,

"I have something to give you, Mrs. Milnes."

"Ah?" she said, raising her eyebrows a little, in her new affected way.

I felt in my coat pocket for my note-book. The envelope was in it done up in another. I found and handed it to her. I had written her name on the outside—

"MRS. ARTHUR MILNES."

"May I ask who it is from?" she said.

"Will you open it?"

She folded and laid down her parasol, and slowly opened the envelope.

"An enclosure?" she said. "Ah!" She seemed apprehensive of something that might frighten her.

She opened the second envelope, which I had sealed up, and put in her fingers to draw out what was inside. She had gloves on, such dainty gloves, and the deep red was in her bonnet and her cloak—deep red and black. She half drew the tress out before she saw it. Then she sat still, white and stone-like.

"Dick Ward gave me two things just before he died," I said, "a packet of letters and this envelope. I was to burn the packet and give the envelope to you."

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She drew in her lips a little. I can see her now sitting there—still, white, and stone-like.

"He said that the hair was beautiful, and that he believed you. He asked me if you had sent any message to him? He asked me if you were happy?"

"If I was *happy?*" she said in a low, hoarse voice.

"I said I thought not."

"What did he say?" she whispered, never raising her eyes, her lips quivering.

"He said, 'Ah! I am sorry!'"

She swayed a little. I drew back. She said nothing more.

"You can drive on," I said to the coachman.

He drove on. I watched them go on down the avenue, and turn off to the right up the drive. I could see the back of her head, her dainty bonnet with its black and red. She had deceived and betrayed—she had killed an honest and simple-minded man—a man who loved her and would have made her happy, and for what? For a little money, for a pretty house; for a grinning monkey husband, and for this pretty carriage in which she sat now, doing some small penance, as I hoped and trusted, for her sins.

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A SOUVENIR OF SUAKIM.

"Oh, yes," said Power, "I was at Suakim" (he pronounced it "Swarkim" in two syllables), "and I saw some of the fighting, but only glimpses. We transport fellows hadn't much chance of getting right up to the front."

It was a miserably wet afternoon, and the small A.U.S.N. northern mail steamer, ploughing along laboriously through the landward waves heaving right across her bows, every now and then struck up a shower that rattled and rustled all down her. I was seated in Power's cabin, on a camp-stool, and, in the dull light of the low cloudy heavens, we were smoking cigars and drinking hot brandy and water. There was no sign or sound of life on the decks. The screw throbbed and jumped as the ship rose and fell. The wind whistled with a plaintive monotony through the steel ropes of the scanty rigging. Power, who was seated in an arm-chair with his feet hoisted up beside mine on the side of the bunk, looked over his shoulder to the small barred book-case against the wall behind him, and I followed his glance. I had seen it before, the thing we were both looking at, but had not quite recognised what it was.

"That's a scalp," he said, with a nod and puff of smoke. "A nigger's—from Suakim."

"I thought it was a mat," I said, "the hair of an animal

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or of some outlandish bird—from New Guinea, probably. All curios come from New Guinea now."

He rose; unhitched the scalp and handed it to me. I examined it. It was a magnificent woolly cheveleure, frizzed out after the most approved method of nature or art, I didn't know which.

"What sort of a place is *Swarkim?*" I asked, with the new pronunciation given a little diffidently.

"Oh, it's a regular Arab town, hundreds and perhaps thousands of years old. If you want to see the Arab civilisation, you couldn't have a better sample. Osman Digna, the Mahdi's generalissimo, was a Suakim man. He was one of the richest men in the place—the only one who had a garden. Suakim is the Red Sea port on the African side for the Mecca pilgrims. They get across from there to Jeddah. Jeddah's just such another town on the other side, fifty or sixty miles above Mecca. Jeddah's about two hundred miles from Suakim, or about half the distance from Sydney to Brisbane."

"And what was it took you to Suakim? How did you get into the transport service during the war?"

"The English Government chartered some of the B. I. boats for the service, and I got onto one of them. But I'd been at Suakim before. In fact I know the Red Sea pretty well, from one end to the other. The B. I. has an agent in the town. That was the man who caught Osman Digna at the slave-trading and began the row."

Seeing that I was interested, he proceeded to expatiate somewhat.

"I've a great fancy for coloured people," he said; "I pick up their lingos quickly, and their ways amuse me. I've told you."

"That comes," I remarked, "of being in a darned steamship line that believes in coolie crews."

He laughed and proceeded.

"Well, I don't know about that altogether, for ever since

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I found out I'd the power of learning languages quickly—and that was seventeen or eighteen years ago, at Amsterdam, when I ran away from my first ship—I liked knocking about among strange people, and seeing what sort they were. They're really very little different from ourselves," he added.

I nodded.

"Well," he said, "about Suakim and the war, and the Australian Contingent, and that scalp. It was an odd sort of thing, when you come to think of it, all those people gathered together there in an out-of-the-way hole—Arabs and Englishmen, and Australians, and a general crew of the blackguards of most of the races under the sun. It was an incident in Australian history—the first and the last, too, of its kind, I fancy."

"Let us hope so," I said.

"I can sketch it out for you exactly as it was—Suakim, I mean. I remember it well. The Red Sea runs down there—straight from north to south with a coral reef along the shore. It's about two hundred fathoms outside, and thirty fathoms inside the reef. Just at this point there is a break in it—a narrow break, the reef on the south side of it running up across the inner passage and leaving an inlet. Coral insects hate mud, and so they won't build at the mouths of the rivers. Even a moderate-sized stream keeps them off, and that's the reason of the passage you always find through the reefs of a coral island. The shore is level, four or five feet above the sea, coral covered with sand. Running in at right angles to the sea, is a regular neck, seventeen fathoms deep all along. Presently this spreads out and shallows into marshes all round. Beyond the first marsh on the northern side of the neck is the town. It's surrounded with a wall, and just at the corner where the wall runs right out of the water, they put up sand-bag batteries, commanding the ships which anchored underneath. A causeway runs across the head of the neck over swampy ground to the southern side. On this side were the two

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cemeteries and the camp of the Friendlies—the friendly Arabs, you know. The English cemetery was nearest to the shore: the Friendlies' cemetery closer to the camp and the town. Then on the northern side again, across the marsh and opposite the sand-bag batteries, was the jetty, with the railway running up north, with the Camp and the scrub all round. That's about a map of the place."

He paused a moment.

"It was pretty lively with us in camp," he said. "The Arabs came up quite close and amused themselves taking pot shots. The railway line was to be three hundred miles right over the plains, and the scrub had to be cleared all the way. Then there was the trench to dig along it, so as to keep them from rushing—banked up on one side and the hollow filled in with prickly bush. And it had to be patrolled day and night. Now and then we'd make a head after a party of them, but it was no good; they always got away. They used to come crawling along, covering themselves with a bit of bush, and then, when we ran out, some of the fellows would clear off like lamplighters and be out of ken in two minutes in the scrub, while others would just scrape in the sand—cover themselves up—stick in the bit of bush atop, and wait till we'd gone back! The electric light was no good at night. First of all we had the whole camp lit up, but the sentries got wild over it. It illuminated them splendidly for the Arabs, who lay and took pot shots till they brought them down, while they themselves could see nothing at all outside the circle of the light. Then searcher-rays into the scrub were tried, and that was a bit better, but right on up to the end the Arabs came as close as they pleased all round, and kept taking their everlasting pot shots. The hospital ship used to lie just by the jetty, till the place got too hot, owing to them squatting on the south side of the neck and dropping bullets through the port holes. It had to be moored up to the north side of the marsh under the camp."

I laughed my sympathy with the sufferers.

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"Twenty-three or four miles off, there were some scrubby hills with wells, and you could see the beggars swarming over them all day like ants. I volunteered to go up in a balloon and drop dynamite into them at night, which would have given them a bit of a scare, I expect, but the 'proposal was not entertained.' They were afraid of the papers taking it up and making a row. Mines were set from time to time, to frighten them from pulling about the trench, but there was not much use in that. You know how you lay a mine? You put down bottles with gun-cotton in them, and strew pebbles and sand all over. If anyone strolls over it, then there's a nice little explosion. The Arabs came and examined one of the mines, with great interest, and couldn't make out what it was; but they took out the bottles and carried them away as souvenirs of that droll sandpie of ours!"

We both laughed this time.

"And the fun of it was," he said, "that the next one we were putting down blew up in the process, and sent the engineer into small pieces, and he was the only man who profited much by the mines."

He paused a moment before proceeding with the particular incident that related to the scalp.

"Well," he said, "one night, I was up in Heney's tent smoking and yarning, when he started a project. You don't know Heney, do you? He's a Brisbane man, though—in the Treasury. They gave him a Government billet when he came back. He says he got into the Contingent and the divorce court (as co-respondent, of course) at the same time. He's a regular devil-may-care is Heney. If ever there's a genuine row on anywhere, he's pretty sure to be in it. He gravitated off to the place months before, by a sort of instinct. You may be sure he was at Sydney at the time of the Contingent, and you may be sure he went. Out here things were not by any means lively enough for him, and now he wanted to have a bit of a farewell adventure before they embarked. Well, that afternoon he'd happened to be

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over on the south side of the neck among the Friendlies, when he met two fellows being carried out to the cemetery to be buried. He went, too, to see what was to be seen, and he said he never clapped eyes on two such magnificent wigs as these two fellows had. 'You see, old man,' he said, 'I haven't a single thing to take back with me as a trophy of this damned stupid one-horsed performance. We've done nothing but march and parade and parade and march and make fools of ourselves all day and most of the night, and I guess that, when we get back to Australeè, we'll get badly laughed at, and serve us jolly well right. It would have been better for me to have stopped at home. There'd have been far more fun in going through the divorce court. Well,' he said, 'the long and the short of it is, old man, that I'm going on the pot-hunting lay—that is, on the hair-hunting lay. I'm going for those two fellows' wigs. Will you come?'"

Power paused a moment and set his cigar smoking again.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I felt a bit that way myself. All I wanted to know was, was he sure he knew the road to where the wigs were stowed? And when he said yes, and that he'd marked the place, we just got up together, picked out a revolver apiece, loosened our knives, and set off. It was a mild, rather stewy night, with the sky all hidden in haze and mist. You could just make out the moon, still and sickly, far out over the sea. Every now and then the breeze came off it, cool but moist. We were right on the outskirts of the camp. You could hear all the noises in the tents quite distinctly, and right out over the plains came occasional lugubrious howls and cries. Then you heard a sentinel call, or a dog bark, or both at once. We got away around the town-wall easy enough, and over the causeway onto the south side, but here you had to be cautious. The Friendlies were a rather peculiar lot. They would have thought very little of having a shot at you whoever you were, more especially if they caught you prowling round their burying-ground. It's my own impression that

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we got quite as many bullets dropped into us at night by the Friendlies as by the other fellows."

He puffed at his cigar.

"Well, we went on, side by side, keeping a pretty sharp look out, right round their camp, and a very nasty tramp and scramble it was in that heavy sand and prickly scrub. I said nothing and he said nothing, but after a bit I set off wondering to myself if really, after all, an Arab's wig was worth all this sweat and scratching? Presently we skirted off again to the right, and then we hit on the burying-ground. The light was just the same. I lifted up my head a little and took a look at the moon, and there she was, still and sickly, up in the ragged swaying clouds far out over the sea. You couldn't tell land or sea or sky, the one from the other, but you could *feel* the sea now, just like a great low breath, as it were gasping up against the land. I noticed it all, but I hadn't a thought of anything ghostly or supernatural in my mind till all at once, right out from the sea straight ahead of us, there came a series of the strangest, most mournful howls I ever heard. They kept up, too. It must have been a pack of jackals down on the shore. Perhaps they were baying at the moon. I can't quite tell you why, but that long, low howling of theirs kept up for so long, now falling and now rising, now taken up by some new voice that presently blended with the others—it just got hold of me. Depend upon it those animals meant something by the way they serenaded that still, sickly moon up there in the great banks of cloud out over the sea. I got an idea into my head that, somehow or other, the souls of those poor Arab fellows had got into these jackals, and that they were complaining of the way things were going on here with the damned foreign white men and their murderous weapons. And all the while, you know, Heney and I kept right on—Heney a bit ahead—and not another sight or sound about us but the misty night wrapping up everything, and that bit of a moon in front overhead, and those jackals keening for all they were worth."

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He paused again, and this time so long that I interjected.

"Well," I said, "and the wigs, did you get them?"

"The place was further on yet," he said, "closer up to the water, the south shore of the neck, that is, and we held on straight for it—stopping once or twice, Heney thinking we'd got there and then finding we hadn't, but that it was a mistake. And all the time those jackals kept up their row, and I kept thinking about the souls of the Arabs. Once or twice it dropped right down to one, and I thought they were going to stop. But it never did. For there was one old fellow—I had a sort of idea he was an old fellow—who was always the one that was in last, and, when he found out all the others had stopped off, he used to take in a big breath and start away more vigorously than ever, till all the others took it up, and the keening was in full swing again. Well, I tell you that this somehow had got hold of me in a quite peculiar manner, and, when Heney came to a halt once more and set to examining, and said we'd got to the graves all right, I had a feeling I didn't want to touch these Arabs' wigs, but let them alone as their owners wanted. Heney had begun groping about in the sand, and I was standing up beside him thinking about it, when the keen fell right away again, all but the old fellow, and he sounded dreadfully weak and dried up by the tune of his voice. But he took up at it again with all the pluck in creation, and, by George, at last he got the lot on the howl more blood-curdlingly than ever! Then I spoke to Heney. 'Look here, old man,' I said, 'I'm not game to take those black fellows' wigs. I'd sooner not. It don't seem fair. We wouldn't like it ourselves.' Of course this struck him as a bit odd and even unreasonable, as you may say, and he cursed a bit and stopped groping. But I had it right in my mind. It was very peculiar, but that was the way of it. And we argued the matter there on the spot right through, and I explained about the jackals, and we listened to them together, and he got to see it as I did."

Once more he paused.

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"Yes," I said, "well?"

"Well," he said, "in the end it took both of us the same, and we got up, and sure enough back we went all the way without the wigs. And the curious part of it was that, just as we got across the causeway, the clouds fell right down and the moon came out clear, and as sure as we'd been about the Friendlies' camp—as we would have been if we'd stopped to get those wigs—we'd have had more bullets at us than would have been at all pleasant. And this was really astonishing, too, for from the lie of those clouds and the wind, and things generally, I could have sworn we were safe from a moon that night as if there hadn't been one."

"And the jackals?" I inquired.

"They kept on keening to the last—till we were out of hearing, owing to the other noises."

"But this wig?" I suggested, lifting it up between my forefinger and thumb. "Did you . . . is this the where did you ?"

He laughed in his unctuous way.

"Oh, yes," he said, "that's one of them, and Heney had the other. You see," he explained, "when we got thinking of it next night, it seemed so tarnation soft to have gone all that way and got nothing, just on account of some gory jackals howling, too, that we made up our minds that we'd go right off there and then, moon or no moon, and get the two wigs. And we did."

"I hope," I said, "that you were both shot at. It would have served you right if you'd both got hit—and you especially."

"Well," he said, "Heney did get hit. He got a bullet in the back of his leg, and that's what's keeping him quiet now. 'Every bullet has its *billet*,' is what he said when he came up to Brisbane with a letter from Dalley, and Griffith put him into the Treasury. He lost the wig on board. Somebody stole it. But he's got the bullet yet. That's his only souvenir of Suakim, you know! It's in his leg."

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LILY DAVENANT.

(WILL JEKYLL'S VERSION.)

So you have not met Lily Davenant at St. Kilda? That is really quite odd, you know, as she would say, and it is still odder that, now that she has found out you are a friend of mine, she hasn't had a pretty little tale to tell you about me. In fact it's so odd, my dear fellow, that I don't believe it. I am not, of course, a quite disinterested critic of the fair Lily, and yet I really believe I can give you a fairly accurate version of the matter. At any rate, I can give you a more accurate one than she can, and in all probability has. Well, then, seeing that the little tale is not only pretty but amusing, here goes for my version of it:—

I.

He was a new chum, just arrived in Sydney from England *viâ* Francisco with a few hundred pounds at his bankers' and the expectation of enjoying a year's holiday in Australia and the adjacent parts thereof.

She was, technically speaking, a new chum also—albeit she had spent three months up at Mackay as a governess, and two in Brisbane as heaven knows what.

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He was walking along the platform one afternoon at the city terminus, looking for a carriage in the Bondi steam tram.

She was seated in a carriage in the Bondi steam tram with a book on her lap.

Then came a coincidence.

As he was passing by that carriage and happened to take a look at her, she lifted her eyes off the book and happened to take a look at him.

He smiled; she smiled, and then she turned her eyes onto her book. He went down the whole length of the tram (which was nearly empty), but couldn't find a carriage to suit him, and so he turned back again.

Then came another coincidence.

As he was passing by that carriage, he happened to steal a side glance at her, and, as she was happening to steal a side glance at him, the two side glances met and made another look.

After that he went up the whole length of the tram, debating in his mind whether he would get into that carriage or not. And subsequently he decided that he would.

He was quite an average sort of young man, and she was of the same sort, only feminine, or so it struck him, anyhow

It is probable that he had been before this directed in his choice of things somewhat in the above manner, and it is probable that she had before this directed other people in their choice of things somewhat in the above manner.

They both had an attachment for novels, and the fact that they both had read them occasionally in yellow paper-backs and were not ignorant of the wit of the lighter Parisian journals constituted in them a subtle and mysterious sympathy. Tennyson talks of star radiating light to star, and insinuates that souls proceed in the same manner, and I dare say he has tried it and knows.

Long before it occurred to this young man to remark to this young woman that it was very warm, he felt sure she would not metaphorically bite his head off for doing so.

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Moreover, he imagined that it was quite possible that they should be discussing problems of some personal interest before they died or even got to Bondi. In fact:

"I knew," he said, smiling charmingly as they glided out of the streets into the more open parts of the line at Moore Park, "I knew you were fond of the same books as I was, the moment I saw the way you were reading 'Satanella.' Ah," he added, with a certain pathos, "poor Whyte Melville! If he had lived another fortnight I should have known him."

"Is he dead?" she asked, smiling equally charmingly, and turning her head on her neck with a swanlike twist that, accompanied by a guileless gaze into a male interlocutor's eyes, was certainly very effective.

"He was killed out hunting."

"Poor fellow!" she said.

She was stopping with a married lady, a friend of hers, one who came out on the same boat and had settled in Sydney. He was going to an hotel, he didn't know which: so, as she had been stopping at Bondi before with her aunt, or cousin, or somebody, and could explain to him something of the lie of the places, as she said, they arranged to meet one another next morning at eleven, and go for a little walk together along the shore.

II.

HER name, it appeared, was Lily Davenant, while his was Seymour Young—at least on this occasion. When we are being idyllic we show a poor spirit if we can't fling off the trammels of a tiresome conventionality, and he really thought that Lily and Seymour would have been better.

When they went for that little walk together along the

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shore, moved by the serene loveliness of things in general, and of Miss Lily Davenant in particular, he suggested something of the sort. The suggestion was entertained.

"I think," he confessed, "that Lily is a very pretty name. And what a pity it is that I haven't a floral one to match! Lily suits you, too, so well!"

"But then," she said, "there are such a lot of lilies—lilies of the valley, arum lilies, tiger lilies, and all sorts of lilies!"

"Well, and which sort of lily will you be?"

"Oh! I will be a lily of the valley, and you shall be a flower too."

"What flower shall I be?"

"Sweet William!"

"Why," he said, "that was a cleverer shot than you thought. For William is my name."

"So I noticed," she replied, "on your bag—William Jekyll. Do you know," she added, "I'm afraid you told me a lie"—and he admitted it.

The sole attempt at a smart remark which this young man ever remembers having concocted of malice prepense, was to the effect that it was a mistake to drink black coffee and smoke a cigar at the same time, because the cigar spoiled the coffee and the coffee the cigar. He is of opinion that this remark, in some shape or another is familiar to all his friends. It came in, however, on this occasion with something less than its usual success.

They were sitting side by side in the shade under a ledge of rock, the cloudless sunny sky and air all about them, the rock-filtering sea at their feet. Then he turned to her and said:

"Has it ever struck you, Lily, that it is impossible to enjoy a lovely scene and a lovely person at the same moment—the lovely scene spoils the lovely person, and the lovely person spoils the"——

"I think that's a very left-handed compliment," she said.

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"So I perceive," he replied, "but I intended it just the other way on."

"How were you going to put it?"

"I was going to say that, since I couldn't look at the lovely scene owing to the presence of the lovely person, I would give it up and take to looking at the lovely person altogether."

"You quite remind me of a pension I was at in Paris," she said. "There was a young Frenchman there who used to make up compliments in that way."

"And what was the end of the compliments, if I might ask?"

"There was no end! And there was about as much in them as there was in the young Frenchman; and that was nothing, you know."

"I wonder," he said, a little absently, "if you have ever made that remark before?"

"Why?"

"Oh, only because I had made mine often before—in one shape or another."

"No, I had never made it before." And that young man felt very much afraid that she had told him a lie (or let us say a fib), but he did not say so. Instead of that,

"This is very jolly," he said.

"It is," she answered, with a little sigh; "very jolly."

"And I wonder," he thought to himself, "if it has any more in it than the compliments and the young Frenchman?"

And a fortnight later, up in his room at the hotel, lying smoking inside his mosquito curtains to stupefy certain industrious insects that were about, he came to the conclusion that there was not, and the silence was broken by the utterance in a decisive tone of a single word of four letters. It began with a "D."

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III.

The next morning they were not to have one of their usual walks together. In fact they had made no arrangement to go out walking together any more, and they both contemplated a return (alone) to town, and the world of separation. At least he did.

It was, then, a pure coincidence that, about half-past three that afternoon a young lady in a bewitchingly airy costume, complete to the daintiest vermilion parasol imaginable, sauntered away along the beach in the direction of a certain ledge of rock, to which some ten minutes later there approached also a young man, with a slouch hat and dressed in flannels, who had fetched a compass round to it from the opposite direction.

She was sitting under that ledge.

She was sitting back against the rock, looking out across the sea, and he had never been more aware of the fascination which can be exercised on an immortal soul by a pair of shoes and portions (liberal portions) of a pair of red silk stockings.

She was so much taken up with the sea, of course, that she did not notice him till he stopped directly in front of her.

"Oh!" she said, lifting her eyebrows a little, "so it's *you!* What brought *you* here?"

Beyond all question there is considerable room for art in the arrangement of a corset, and it is astonishing the fascination which it also can exercise on an immortal soul.

"Yes," he said, "strange to relate, it's me. It would be more grammatical to say, 'It's I.' But what the devil is the good of grammar?"

Her eyebrows went up a little again and so did her lips. Her eyebrows were soft brown and delicately traced, and her lips were freshly red, and, when pursed up in this way,

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had (what the scientific people would call) a correlation with the idea of osculation which this young man was not altogether unacquainted with.

She had also a pretty little trick, when she was amused, of putting the tip of her tongue out onto the upper lip, and this young man, happening to think of it at this moment, almost shut his eyes and smiled in a peculiar and foolish manner.

"I must say," she said at last, "your language grows more and more choice on acquaintance."

"My language," he replied, "is like you. I am going back to town by the first tram to-morrow morning," he added.

"I am so sorry. I shall miss you a *lot* in the afternoon."

"You will easily replace me. There are plenty of fools about."

"Ah! but then I like nice fools, and you, William, are simply perfect that way."

"Simply perfect—simply quite too utterly perfect."

"How long shall you stay in Sydney?"

"A few days. There's nothing to see there and nothing to do. I shall go to Brisbane."

"Well, I'm going down to Melbourne presently. I have friends there. I wonder, shall we ever *meet a-gain?*"

"I am sure I hope you will enjoy yourself. And now," he said, "I think you may as well be saying good-bye, as I am going down to the baths, and this evening I shall be engaged."

"Good-bye!"

"Lily," he said, "you are a demon!"

She laughed.

"Do you think so?" she asked, puckering up her face a little and looking at him with the swan-neck move before alluded to.

"Don't put out your tongue," he said, "or I may feel inclined to shove you off this rock down below. And there are sharks."

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"Why are you so obstinate?" she asked.

"No, it is you that are obstinate."

"Why won't you be friends?"

"Because you will not let me."

"What do you mean?"

"Who could be friends with a sorceress like you, for ever enticing and for ever repelling?"

"Enticing? I have never enticed you!"

"You lie! and you know it."

"It is brave of you to stand there and try and shout a girl down by calling her a demon, and a sorceress, and a liar. I used to have an idea that gentlemen did not do things like that."

"It is your own fault! you drive me mad! Nothing will suit you but to torment me. I will stand it no more. I will go."

"I don't in the least see why you shouldn't stay."

"Great Heavens! do you think I'm made of stone? What do you want with me? I have offered you everything I have—name, money, what you will! and you will not take me at any price. Let me go then. You intoxicate me. Some day I shall do you a harm."

She laughed softly.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," she said, "I'll take the chance!"

"Do you know," he said in a low voice, "that everyone believes—that everyone says that you are my——" He paused.

She was looking at the ground, apparently watching the end of her parasol, which she was digging gently into the shingly earth.

"I don't care," she said, smiling slightly, "it's nothing *to me*."

And it seemed that she told the truth, for he came up to town by the first tram next morning.

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That, my dear fellow, is the pretty little tale, the amusing, pretty little tale, and I am not sure but that I will revoke that statement about her ability to tell it with an equal accuracy to mine. You may say to her, if you like, that I have told it you, and ask her how she is getting on at Melbourne with the other fools. Tell her, too, that I don't think Sandgate is a patch on Bondi. You may say to her, too, that I should be pleased to hear from her (G.P.O., Brisbane, will find me for a week or two yet), and you may inform me at your leisure, my dear fellow, what you think about her (say) by the end of January.

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MISS JACKSON.

He stopped suddenly and stared in front of him. Then he turned to me and said: "Do you see that girl?"

We were in King Street, Sydney; it was about four o'clock on a lovely autumn afternoon, and Murdoch and I were taking a stroll. Murdoch is a very old friend of mine. We were at Marlborough together, and again at University College, London, when he was a student of medicine and I a student of all things in general and nothing in particular. I had just lit on him in Sydney, lately married, and a flourishing young suburban medico, and we were full of reminiscence and narrative. We had had lunch at Compagnoni's, and were sauntering along when, turning round one of the corners of Pitt and King Streets, he stopped suddenly, stared in front of him, turned to me and said:

"Do you see that girl?"

I glanced in the direction indicated by his eyes and the wave of the hand holding his cigar, and saw a lady standing in front of a jeweller's window looking carelessly in, rather with the air of a person who was whiling away the moments of an expected rendezvous than of a passer-by attracted by the wares exposed. I knew her at once. It was Mrs. Medwin. Mrs. Medwin is the wife—the young second wife—of one of our best-known Victorian squatters and politicians. Perhaps

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she was here on the return from her honeymoon. It was only six or seven months ago that Medwin married her, and the two went off at once for a trip to England, purposing to return by New York and San Francisco.

We were now directly opposite her, and, as she was still looking in at the window, it seemed improbable that she would see us. A small group of pedestrians, coming from the opposite direction upon us, compelled me to step ahead of Murdoch. At that very moment I saw, by the glance I cast over my left shoulder as I advanced, that she turned rather suddenly. She almost ran into him. By the time I had wheeled round it was all over. Their eyes had met; an extraordinary expression had flashed over her beautiful face; he had raised his hat, she had bowed her head slightly, and then he was with me and we were walking on together again and away from her. That impression of her face as their eyes met is as vivid to me at this moment as it was then.

I behold her before me as I write. She never had much colour, but you could not call her pale. I have seen Italian women at Naples with just her warm, moulded features, like olive-hued marble. Her eyes had a singular look that reminded me of the jewelled, enamelled eyes in certain statues. Whenever I saw her the prevalent colour of her dress was always something metallic—golden or silver or bronze. Probably she did it on purpose. She knew it suited her peculiar style of beauty. I saw her married, and the orange and glistering white of her toilet were like solid bronze and silver. I never thought her cold. She gave me the impression of passion in a calm and deep slumber, but I confess that that sudden glimpse of her face as she saw Murdoch, and the subtle heightening of its colour—not a blush or even a flush, it was so faint and evenly distributed—made her, for the first time, strike me as not only a beautiful statue, but a lovely woman.

He did not repeat his question, and I did not answer it for quite a minute. We walked on side by side. Then I said:

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"Girl? You would scarcely call her a girl. She is every inch of her a woman. She is Mrs. Medwin."

"Mrs. Medwin? Mrs. Medwin?" he repeated, vaguely. "I know the name somehow."

"Medwin is one of the richest men in Victoria or Australia. His first wife was, perhaps, the best-known personage in Melbourne 'society.' She ruled it like an empress. Imagine the luck of that great, hulking brute to have found such a woman as that as her successor! Did you know her in England?" I asked mildly, after having eased him off with this.

But he still refused to be communicative.

I tried a second flight.

"It seems amazing," I said, "to light on a face or form like hers here. She is the sort of feminine type one meets in the drawing-rooms of old superb civilisations, one of the ladies of Imperial Rome, or mediæval Florence or Venice, at the court of Henri Quatre, or, perchance, at some Viennese embassy. What has fecund splendour like this to do with the 'ghastly, thin-cheeked' aperies of this tenth-rate pseudo-civilisation of ours here in Australia? The music to which such a woman walks is that of a Galuppi or a Chopin; and, lo, Australian social life thrills to the vulgar temerity of barbarous iron-framed pianos, usually bought on the time-payment system! She seemed quite unconscious of us all, thank Heaven! Everyone was looking at her, and she paid about as much heed to them as Faustina did when she sat with poor, dear Marcus Aurelius in the Imperial box at the amphitheatre, and the Roman mob united with Roman 'society' in canvassing her character."

"That is beastly high-flown," he said, a little irritably, "I should have thought five years of Australia would have toned down your exuberant fancy a bit more, old man."

We went on right up King Street, and, following some imperceptible impulse, passed over into Hyde Park. We entered a shady alley and paced on side by side, smoking in silence.

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"How she is changed," he said reflectively, "and yet not changed. She is just the same—exactly the same. It is only that she is richer, riper. She has finer clothes now, and has been living well. She was inclined to be even a bit skinny then. I came out in the same ship with that girl," he added, to me more particularly. "Her name was Jackson, Miss Jackson."

"It was," I said.

"I was doctor on the ship—a sailer, one of the old Black-wall liners. We came by the Cape, of course. There were thirteen of us in the saloon, and the skipper and first and second mates. Miss Jackson was one. She came out alone in the skipper's charge, or his wife's, or both, and she had a cabin to herself. The ship had many cabins but few passengers."

He paused for a moment. He was speaking in rather a dreamy way now, looking in front of him as if at the rising shapes of his memories. Then he suddenly seemed to decide to sit down on an empty bench under a dense-leaved Moreton Bay fig, and I took my place beside him.

"I will tell you about her," he said, "what I know. It isn't much. We were rather above the average collection of people on board—for a sailer. There were only five women; the rest men. There was the skipper's wife, a stout, rather showy, but at bottom motherly old soul; the wife of one of the passengers, also stout and showy, and addicted to divers liquors; an old maid of a long and lean but rather nice type, reading nice books and playing nice music; her cabin-companion, the grown-up daughter of another of the passengers, an old colonist who had made his pile; and, lastly, Miss Jackson. Among the men there were two sets, both of which, however, were on very good terms with each other. There was the sporting set, the fellows who played 'nap' perpetually; got up deck games; fished for sharks or albatrosses, and the rest. And there was another set that was quieter, read the better class of novels, played

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chess, and talked rather 'intelektooal.' The women had a tendency to keep to themselves. There was one fellow who understood the whole lot, and in his quiet way got on with the whole lot. His name was Allenson."

He paused again. Then, turning and looking at me, said:

"Allenson was just a devil. He was rather like you."

I laughed.

"Thank you," I said.

"Not like what you are *now*," he proceeded, "but like what you were at Marlborough, and even a bit at the College. He was what you call a thorough gentlemen. He was always quite at his ease, calm, courteous, with lots of tact. He never showed you he despised you, or, rather, did not consider you of the very least importance—in fact, thought himself almost of another flesh and blood to you; but that was what in his heart he must have felt. He never said so, but I am quite certain he was of some swell family. I have no idea what was bringing him out in a Blackwall liner to Australia. Perhaps he had been overdoing things in town, and had made up his mind to a health-voyage and some quiet travel at the other end. I'll admit that he was the best-looking man I ever saw. He was a bit 'intelektooal' too. When he came on board he looked pale and rather worn, but this soon passed and presently he was magnificent. He dressed finely—in the very best taste, and he was the only perfectly made man I ever met. I can't tell you how I hated him!"

He looked at me again.

"If you could have been like him," he said, "you would have been happy. He was your ideal—your ideal in the old school and college days. And this Allenson turned his eyes on Miss Jackson."

He threw away the end of his cigar, frowned, and drove his hands into his pockets.

"You know her?" he said. "You met her, perhaps, before she married Medwin?"

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"I met her once or twice," I said, "but it was nothing."

"Well," he proceeded, "I think she was even nicer then than she is now. She wasn't so beautiful. She has bloomed out since. She was rather thin, and did not seem robust. She was poor, going out, an orphan, to a new land, to a strange home, with a distant relation who had agreed to take her. The skipper knew the man—a half-uncle or something. He lived up near Sandhurst, and was manager of a mine. Her outlook was far from bright. I myself," he said, with a sudden rapidity, "had no notion of what might be in store for me, for I wasn't such a fool as to think fortunes were to be got for the mere seeking in Australia nowadays—but—but— Well, what am I talking about?"

"You were talking about Miss Jackson," I said, incidentally wondering to myself what sort of "girl" was the "girl" who presided over the domestic arrangements in that medical suburban home where I was to partake of dinner that evening.

"Allenson," he proceeded again, "was a terribly dangerous sort of man for women. No woman can ever get over the fact of a genuinely good-looking man. Even if he's a fool and a stick, they can't get over it—and what can they do, what *do* they do, when he is the very reverse of a fool and a stick? I watched the devil drop his meshes round that girl day by day, and could effect nothing. I couldn't even quarrel with him. The man witched me as he did everybody. Even the stupid brewer lot—there were three of them—swore by him. They said he was very 'affable!' It was sickening!"

He drew his hands out of his pockets in a quick, nervous manner; leant his elbows on his knees, and bent forward.

"She got a way, presently," he said, "of looking up with a curious expression whenever he came to her or spoke to her. I knew what that meant. And yet she was as proud as Lucifer. Anyone could see that. It came out over and over again. I never for a moment imagined he intended

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marrying her. Men like that don't marry till they begin to get bald and take an infatuation, a *grande passion*—(you know)—or else they wait till they've got heads as bare as billiard-balls and make fools of themselves. Perhaps he wasn't rich enough. He might have sought the earth through to get a girl to equal her, anyway! I thought he was amusing himself with her—creating an 'interest' on the voyage. Not that he seemed bored, but he had a way of sitting in his deck-chair, motionless like a statue, looking in front of him, and I know he must have found us dreadful poor company. Then one night in the tropics I got a shock."

Once more he paused.

"It was a dark warm evening;" he said, "no moon and the stars not very bright. It wasn't oppressively hot. There was a steady breeze aft, sending us along at five or six knots an hour—the tail-end of the trades. Most of the passengers were down in the saloon, playing cards, singing or reading. There was nobody on the poop but the man at the wheel and the officer of the watch. I came up for a breath of air and walked down one side of the poop and round by the helm and up the other. I had on indiarubber-soled deck-shoes, and it was so dark, outside of the glare coming from the sides of the saloon sky-lights, that I was upon them before I was aware of it. They were standing below the boat, leaning together, their elbows on the taffrail, and his hand holding hers. I passed on immediately and went below."

He sat up.

"That was all," he said, "all I saw of their love-making. I don't know how it went. I could only guess, but that guessing process used to drive me wild. For about a fortnight she looked a different girl, like a rose-bud that had bloomed out into a rose. Then came another change. I could see her day by day suffering torture. And I could say nothing—do nothing. I tried once. It was merely the vaguest expression of sympathy, of kindly feeling. She

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would not look at me for a week. I suffered torture too. I can't describe it. Especially at nights."

He paused.

"And so," he said with a sigh, "day followed day, and week week, and things went from bad to worse. I saw he was getting tired of her. I used to long to smash his face in. Not that he behaved brutally or rudely to her: I should have done it if he had. No, he was just the same, calm and courteous, only to her it was a little cold and distant, and, so to say, oblivious. We were round the Cape now, and into the roaring forties. Some days we made great runs—280 or even 300 miles. We had the wind right behind us, bowling us along to Australia at full speed. Then we had a taste of storm for two days with heavy rain."

He paused once more, and longer than before, sitting looking in front of him at the asphalt of the walk.

"It was the second evening after the storm," he went on slowly. "The ship was close-hauled, and heeled over very considerably to leeward. The rain had drawn off a little towards sunset, and three or four of them—the skipper, his wife and the old maid, with one or two of the men—were walking up and down the weather-side of the poop, getting up an appetite for dinner. It grew so dark that you couldn't see more than a few yards clearly in front of you. Every now and then a shower of spray broke over the poop, and this ended in driving the ladies below, but the skipper, one of the young brewers and myself still kept up our walk. At last I had had enough for the nonce, and turned off between the sky-lights and was passing down to the lee-side of the deck when I almost lurched up against Miss Jackson. She was standing with her back to me in just the same position as that other time. I did not dare to speak to her, and went on to the ladder. Allenson was coming up it. I drew back without a word, and he mounted and passed me. I went down onto the main deck and hung about, talking with one of the mates. The first bell for dinner hadn't gone yet; so

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having nothing to do, I went up again by the other ladder on the poop to the skipper and the young brewer, who were still tramping up and down, and fell in with them. We staggered along on the oblique deck and discussed the construction of iron ships, and the future of sail as against steam. About a minute later, as we were all turning by the ladder, we saw the form of a woman come out from round the first sky-light. It was so dark that it was possible only to guess even so much as that. She came along steadily to us, and was with us as we made our first few steps forward together. I knew who it was of course, at once. It was Miss Jackson. She addressed the skipper.

"Captain," she said in a quiet voice, "I heard a cry, I think. Is every one on board?"

The skipper was incredulous.

"Where did you hear it?" he asked, in a light tone.

"Along by the helmsman," she said. "Someone passed a moment ago, and sat on the rail."

We left her and went aft to the helmsman.

"If it's any one," said the skipper, "it's Mr. Allenson. I warned him only yesterday about sitting on the taffrail."

"The helmsman said that four or five minutes ago someone had come and sat on the taffrail behind him, and then went forward a bit, but it was dark and he'd such a lot to do to keep her head up to the wind that he didn't notice who it was. That was all. No one ever saw any more of Allenson."

He stopped suddenly and showed no sign of continuing.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "How did he fall overboard?"

"I don't know. No one ever knew. No one was ever sure, even, that he fell overboard that evening at that time, or when. The last time he was seen (unless the helmsman saw him) was up on the fo'c'sle half-an-hour or so before. Several people saw him there."

"But how can that be," I asked, "since you yourself said

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you saw him come up the ladder onto the lee side of the poop by Miss Jackson?"

"Did I say so? I never said so at the investigation we held."

He got up.

"Let's go on," he said.

We walked away together.

"But, look here," I said, "I don't understand. Do you mean to imply that it was an accident, or that he went down behind the helmsman and sat on the taffrail again, talking to her, and she shoved him over?"

He had taken out another cigar.

"What do I know about it anyway?" he said, biting off the end and spitting it out. "Can you give us a light?"

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HIS TRIP "HOME."

I.

He looked at her.

Assuredly, from one point of view, and her own point of view, there was no fault to be found in her.

As she lay back there in the lounge, gazing out of the open trellised window, with a vague and dreamy contentment in her eyes and on her face that made her seem positively kind and good, he realised and summed her up to himself.

She was the perfection of civilised self-indulgence, and her feelings towards him were the supreme and crowning sensation of it. Yes, all her little soul was in her senses, and it was only his boyish imagination that had ever imagined it otherwise. He had thought this any time these two years. Now he was sure—perfectly sure of it.

She had at last got everything which she wanted, himself included. And her complete and easy happiness gave her a certain poetry and truth which he recognised as the only truth and poetry which she had ever possessed.

But how thin and common it was at heart! How utterly a thing of knots and ribbons and pretty pigments! How wearisome to anyone who lived for something more than trifles and the sheerest self-satisfaction!

She lay with one foot on the other knee, and the round-

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ness of the black silk stockings, with their delicate golden clocks, and the dainty, black, gold-threaded shoes, in which every now and then she very gently contracted and thrust out her toes, like a purring cat its claws, came upon him as a sort of typical image of her, and made his lips curl cruelly.

The thought occurred to him of the Other One away in Australia—of the girl he loved and who loved him—of the girl of imperious trusts and tendernesses who demanded of him, for herself and for others, the best that was in him. Her turn of vengeance was coming.

His plan had worked with astonishing success.

He had satisfied himself for ever on this point.

Now he would ring down the curtain on the comedy.

II.

He leant forward, looking at her with a smiling countenance.

He called her by her full name—ironically appreciating the tawdry element in it.

"Irene!"

She slowly turned her closing eyes to his, letting her left hand, which rested on the side of the chair, incline a little with her head, and smiled back at him.

"I took my ticket by the Orient boat this morning," he said.

"Well, Willie?"

"She sails the day after to-morrow."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that I am going in her."

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"What do you *mean?*"

Her eyes had rounded gently with astonishment, but as yet she had not the least alarm.

"Oh," he said, "only just what I say."

"But I do not understand you."

There was a pause.

"I," she said, "don't want to go to Australia, not in the least."

"You," he replied, still smiling, "can do exactly as you please. You are free. And so am I, and I am going to Sydney by the Orizaba on Thursday, if things happen as I expect. I live in Sydney, you know."

She began to laugh.

She thought he was trying to tease her.

"And what do you want to go to Sydney for?" she asked. "Haven't you had enough of it?"

"I want to go to Sydney to get married, and I expect that I shall live there 'for the term of my natural life.'"

"You are joking," she said, suddenly serious, and regarding him more fixedly.

He rose with a sardonic grin.

"Irene," he said, his hands on his hips, his head bent down, his eyes holding hers, "you have made a mistake. I have had enough of London. That is why I am going back to Sydney."

"But . . ." she murmured.

"And it is not only London that I have had enough of, but of a person who lives there; and *you* are that person."

Her mouth opened, but no sound proceeded from it.

He had effectively startled her.

Her hands fell upon her lap, and she lay almost helpless. She was frightened.

The hard, scornful indifference of his face frightened her. She saw that he was in earnest—that it was not a joke. And this sudden and utterly unexpected ruin of her happiness paralysed her.

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But her astonishment had not ceased. It had rather grown. She comprehended nothing.

He burst out laughing, for her expression struck him as ludicrous. Then, drawing the chair up close to him, he sat down again and spoke to her.

III.

"LISTEN," he said, raising his finger, "I have a little story to tell you."

He paused for a moment.

When he began speaking it was with the simple, serious tone of one who clothes some vital truth under a semi-fictional guise.

"There were once," he said, "two people—a girl and a boy. The girl was the elder, and in many ways she was also the wiser and more experienced. As children they lived together. Later on they were separated. Their education, which was an elaborate one, necessitated it. They sometimes thought of one another, and occasionally they met. It is not perhaps too much to say that as the boy developed into a young man he grew to love the girl, and think of his future life in connection with hers. I cannot tell but what the same idea had, in some vague shape or other, occurred to her."

She acquiesced silently.

"Well, so things went on till their education was almost finished. She was in Germany—he in London. Their parents were not rich. They were professional people who lived up to, and even a little over, their income. The young man had always understood that he was to make his own way in the world, and he had been trained for several years for the

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Indian Civil Service. In reality, from a pretty early date, he had felt a strong inclination towards writing. He had written little stories, some of which had been published in obscure magazines. The young woman knew all about this. She had read the stories. She had listened to his talks and hopes and dreams. She had never said she believed in them. On the contrary, though they had pleased her, she had always tacitly taken them as a mere side-issue to him—as an 'accomplishment'—as a diversion in the serious business of his career."

He paused and looked away.

"I well remember," he said, in a low tone, "the last time they met—I mean the last time they were really together. They had been separated for over a year. He had changed much. He was utterly dissatisfied and unsettled. He loathed the idea of India and a career as a civil servant there. He wanted to write a novel. He wanted to devote himself to Literature, with a capital 'L,' of course. He believed that was what he was meant for. His people were naturally all against him; and so were hers. Everyone was against him. Well, they talked together—he and she. He told her about his ideas, his artistic ideas, and ambitions. It was not her fault that he did not tell her everything. But there was no need. She knew it. By heaven," he exclaimed, turning to her, "if ever a lad loved a girl, or a man a woman, whom he longed to have as the embodiment of all that was best in him, he loved her!"

She shrank from his sudden repellant gaze, and he looked away again as he continued.

"Well, she said nothing. She remained enigmatical—attracting him with little, delicate, delightful touches and provocations, but persistently keeping an impassable barrier between them. She liked him—perhaps even she loved him a little. Sometimes she would have let him take her in his arms and kiss her, but she knew what that meant. It meant passion and loss of self-control. It meant throwing in her

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lot with his. It meant becoming first his betrothed and then his wife. He was so vehement—so imprudent. And so they parted, and nothing had happened."

He paused once more.

"Events followed fast then," he said. "He failed in his exam.—failed badly. He was fifty-third or fourth—a whole league off the successful twenty. And, as it was the first failure of his life, it was a bitter one. His people all turned on him. He was to have one more chance next year, and no more. His father insisted brutally on his devotion to his work at the crammer's—seized all his books, his little library of poetry and prose, which constituted to him (or so he thought) his inner or true life, and locked it up. He even threatened to destroy it. A week or so later, over at Dresden, the young woman received a startling letter from him. He had left home. He was to have £100 or so of his own by his uncle's will on coming of age, and he had wrung this out of his parents now, and would trouble them no more. He was writing a novel, and trying to get work on the newspapers."

He looked at her again.

"You know," he said, "the letter of reply which she wrote him. It was a perfect sample of sympathetic non-committal. She wished the novel every success, but bade him be careful to keep his peculiar 'ideas' out of it. He was so heterodox in everything, and it would only shock people, and ruin the book. So 'they all' had told her, and so she thought herself. But if ever a girl said to a man: 'If you succeed, I will give myself to you,' that girl said so there to him, and she knew it, and knew that he knew it, too.

"But," he went on, "he didn't succeed. She was quite right. She understood his public far better than he did himself. He put his 'ideas' into his book, and spent his last £20 in bringing it out, and the 'respectable' newspapers all called it 'impious' and 'obscene,' and the circulating libraries boycotted him, and in less than a month he stood

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with £1 15s. 7d. between him and starvation, his literary carreer hopelessly damned at the very start, and his one small, secure, journalistic market cut off from him by the 'scruples' of a sanctified smug of an editorial part-proprietor. In one word, London and England were too hot for him. A sudden and unexpected chance presented itself, and barely three months after his career as a writer had begun and apparently ended, he crept away out of the country—in the words of his exasperated 'papa' and 'mama'—an abject failure and disgrace!"

IV.

His speech had become animated, but it never lost its low, suppressed tone, and his eyes, gleaming dangerously, showed no more intense emotion than a sort of impartial irony.

"Before he went," he said, "he wrote several letters to the girl. He let himself go. He told her all his suffering and his love. He asked her to love him and be true to him and help him to be true to himself, and added, in his presumptuous way, that before five years were over, he would yet win, and lash back all these curs yelping to their kennels. But he was not quite a fool, and none of these letters went. He felt her power. He respected her social demands. And also his heart was too sore and feeble to stand that last blow of all—that soft, deliberate thrust back of her beautiful, pitiless fingers. The letter he *did* send was quite different. At the utmost it raised a plea for a few years' grace—two years—three years. That was all. It was quite indirect. There was nothing compromising about it. Nothing whatever."

He paused.

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"In Australia, in Melbourne," he said, "the young man began more diffidently. He let literature alone. He set himself to the task of feeding and clothing himself, and he was thrashed to death for a year or two in the shafts of the lower journalism. Then came his chance. He leaped at it and grasped it. Sydney was his Mexico. It was in the third year of his absence that he was bold enough to write to the girl and ask her to marry him. He knew her well enough to know that he ought to state his worldly qualifications. They were about these. He was a leader-writer on the staff of one of the daily papers; was making at the rate of about £400 a year, had every prospect of making another extra hundred the next year, and so on up to £700 or even £800; was creating, moreover, a bit of a name for himself as a recognised writer of fiction and criticism, also with happy and extending prospects, and had set to work on another novel.

"But here," he said, "comes a digression—an important digression—Another Girl!"

Their eyes met again, and he looked away, smiling slightly.

"I needn't describe her much," he said. "It is enough to say that she was very different from the first. She was younger than he was, with brown, vehement eyes and flushing cheeks, and, as she was one of four sisters, she taught music. I never heard a girl who played a certain style of music better than she did. She was really great at it. And her opinions—I may even say her 'ideas'—on things were striking. They were rather crude, you know, but striking. The young man felt all this, and it attracted him. They became friends—something more than acquaintances. You understand? And, presently, somehow or other, he glided into the confidential with her, and, when he found out that she liked his little tales, and criticisms, and leaders, and had her own views of them, which were pretty well summed up in the conviction that he ought to do

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something bigger and better, why, he was weak enough to tell her, bit by bit, and at last altogether, the story of his 'literary career' and his aspirations and ambitions. And he even—this may seem weaker still and stupider still, as you like to take it—he even told her about the Girl in England."

"I am sure," murmured Irene, who had gradually regained the use of her tongue; "I am much obliged to you."

"Well," he proceeded, "to return. The girl in England wrote him the prettiest letter imaginable. It was neither yes nor no. It simply emphasised the fact that '*Australia*' was a horrid place, a dreadful long way off, the home of convicts and bushrangers and kangaroos, and all that, and that £400 a year, especially in *journalism*, was scarcely a satisfactory compensation therefor, and that on the whole she would stay where she was. He was weak enough, or stupid enough, or both, to show this letter to the Other Girl and ask her advice about it, and her advice about it was to write again. She herself was just going away. She was going up to Queensland to what we call in Australia a 'squatter's' family—that means the family of a big sheep-owner, you know—as governess, though she was doing very well with the music, and her mother and her sisters were all in tears about her leaving them. He also remonstrated a little, but with no avail. So just after he said good-bye to her and saw her off, he sat down and wrote again to the Girl in England. In three months he received her answer. It was straight 'no' this time. She 'would rather die than go out to Australia.' The conclusion was milder. It said nothing, but it implied a good deal. If he would come to England, and if he could make a success there, why, things might be different. And it is on record that that Young Man entertained this demi-semi proposition in a serious manner and wrote to that effect."

He paused once more.

"But behold," he said, "the joys of loving girls who never-

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compromise themselves! In reply to this letter he received a communication which was a work of art. Put simply, it amounted to this. That Girl in England had gone and married another man, and the cheerful fact that he was excessively good and kind and loved her beyond expression, was, so to say, consummated by the second fact that he was old enough to be her father (or grandfather), was rich, and had a liver so constituted as to preclude any hopes of a protracted existence—hah!"

He flung up his hand with a gesture of disgust.

V.

SHE lay staring at him, once more frightened, dimly conscious of the drift things were taking.

"Let us pass by three years or so," he said, "during which that Young Man was periodically made aware, in the sweetest and cleverest manner imaginable, of the *quiet, happy home-life* of the Girl in England, the only blight on which was the ever-growing dread of the ultimatum of the conjugal liver. He was able to state its condition with some accuracy, and to contemplate the period when a flow of serous matter into the heart should bring that *quiet, happy home-life* to an abrupt termination. Yet it is once more on record that that portion of the correspondence for which he is responsible, though tinged with a certain degree of irony, was not of an angry or scornful, not to say vindictive character. Her confident anticipation that he 'would be above all vulgar rancour' had been 'justified.'"

He again reflected for a moment.

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"At the end of these three years," he said, "two events happened. The first was the publication in England of the Young Man's second novel, and the astonishing success which it had. It might almost be called a furore. He was totally unable to keep pace with the demands of publishers and public. All his fictional work, done out in Australia among the convicts and bushrangers and kangaroos and all that, was reprinted. He had, in a word, won a vogue, a prodigious vogue, such as is won every four or five years by some lucky novelist or other, and the sums of money that rolled in fairly staggered him. The second event was the presentation of the ultimatum of the conjugal liver. Almost by the same post as the decisive missive from his publisher in London, which insisted on the necessity of his appearance in the metropolis to completely overhaul their business relations, he received one of the exquisite epistolatory art-compositions which were the delight of his later existence. The husband was indeed dead, and the lady was free, wealthy and willing. How well she knew the sweet, keen thrills of delight which her congratulation as to his '*success, his amazing and overwhelming success*,' would give to the Young Man at the barbaric Antipodes! She spoke with no uncertain voice now! She owned her loneliness, her tedium, even her longing. She spoke of the long trial of the last years of her married life. What a letter! It was rapturous! It was divine! There was the little spark in it, too—the touch of lambent flame—the quiver of the long-repressed and aching passion! Oh, ye gods!"

He turned his face to her, flashing with cruelty and exultancy.

He rose to his feet again, and looked down at her, where she lay crouched and contracted, her eyes staring fascinated out of her large white face, ready to receive the lashes of his scorn and hate on her delicate, shrinking flesh.

"I came to you, Renè," he said, "I found you just as I thought. You were less cautious than of old, my dear. Oh,

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no! You would still not compromise yourself to your world. By no means! But you compromised yourself readily enough to me. It is six months since your husband died. It was to be another six months till you and I were married. All was to be done in order. Your Social God was to be placated. Your cursèd, little, petty, cackling clique—your mouthing, mewing London 'set'—was not to have a word against you. But meantime the demands of a long-deferred passion"

He raised his hands at her with curving, convulsive fingers.

"Ah," he cried, "you craven vampire! You blood-sucker of my boyhood's faith and hope and love! I have struck you down at last! I have caught you and ripped your wings and ground you squealing under my heel!"

She was crying out in terror of his violence—a hard, discordant cry in one protracted note, her eyes like those of a man at the triangles who works round and watches the shrieking approach of the gathered lashes. He made a prodigious effort of self-restraint, and sat down in silence with folded arms, in the chair.

There was a long silence.

"You needn't be afraid," he said in a quiet voice, "I won't strike you—I won't hurt you. I despise you too much. I won't even look at you now any more. I loathe you too much. I have worked out my vengeance on you, and it suffices. You, who have played with fire all your life and never been burned, have felt the red-hot brand held to your brow as they held it to the brow of the other harlots ages ago. You, who have played with pitch in kid gloves and kept your hands clean, have been tarred and feathered all over like the spiritual vagabond and rogue that you are! I think that is enough."

He rose calmly.

"Good-bye," he said.

She lay quite still; staring at him as before, her face gone grey and old and petrified.

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She was speechless. Her tongue could not stir. Her lips could not move.

As for him, he had recovered himself, and went out of the room with a sardonic indifference, the sunshine after that short storm-cloud of frenzy.

Yes, his trip "home" had been accomplished successfully in every respect.

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"UP-COUNTRY."

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"LONG FORSTER."

THE first time I saw Tony, generally called "Long," Forster he was slouching along Ruthven Street, Toowoomba. Tony wasn't the sort of man you could easily miss. In the first place, he stood six feet eight inches in his stockings; but, anyway, he had a face and a general sort of look about him that made you turn your head and have a stare when he'd passed. On one occasion I remember hearing a shopman ask a customer, a new chum, if he'd seen Long Forster down the street? The new chum replied: "I don't know. What's he like?" Whereto the shopman: "A sort of hand-me-down-a-star chap, rolling around the pavement, half asleep, and with his eye in the gutter." The new chum recognised the description at once. I also recognised it that day when I first saw Tony in Ruthven Street, Toowoomba. I was walking with my friend Johnson. Johnson knew him well. In many a shed had they sheared together; once they had been chums up in the Gulf. Anywhere from the Gulf to the New South Wales Riverina they had knocked against one another, and the man with the money had held out his purse to the man without, in the good old up-country style. I said:

"Why, there's Long Forster!"

"You've hit it," said Johnson. "There wasn't much room to miss."

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We stood and watched the giant rolling lackadaisically along, hands deep in the pockets of his stupendous trousers, parasol-like hat slouched over his eyes. A small child of two or three years old was playing on the pavement a few yards in front of him. Suddenly looking up and seeing this huge moving tower coming down upon her, the little maid seemed to think it was high time to be getting out of it. Rising onto her feet and extending her tiny arms as if to feel her way, she lowered her head and advanced courageously, with her eyes shut. At this moment Tony became aware of the diminutive figure at his base, and stopped. The little maid, continuing to advance, reached his legs and, still feeling her way, passed right through them and out at the other side, when she opened her eyes, and with a big and very audible sigh of relief trotted off. Tony, mildly astonished at the whole proceeding, had wheeled round and was solemnly watching her as she went. Johnson burst into a fit of laughing, and so did I.

"You know," said Johnson, "that chap's about the softest-hearted cuss ever lived. He wouldn't hurt a fly. He won't go on till he's sure he hasn't put one of his floppers onto that little kid just by mistake. Let's go over."

We went over.

"Well, Tony," said Johnson, "you came near killing her that time. By Jingo, you did!"

"Did I?" said Tony. "*Go on!*"

Johnson appealed to me.

I laughed and admitted that it was a close shave.

Johnson introduced us to one another.

"This is my particular friend, Acheson," he said. "He's *white!*"

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance," said Tony, drawing out and enveloping my hand in the broadest palm I ever felt or saw on mortal man.

We proceeded down Ruthven Street, Tony in the middle.

"And what brings you in, old man?" asked Johnson.

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"A bit of business," said Tony.

"Where 're yer stopping?"

"At Billy White's."

"Not on the bust?"

Tony shook his head.

"No," he said. "Will you come up? Got anything to do?"

"Nothing particler."

"Friend come too?"

I accepted, and we turned off up Herries Street towards White's Hotel.

Johnson and Tony had plenty of questions and answers to give and take. It was long since they had met, and, now that Johnson had taken up a bit of a selection by Helidon and hadn't gone round shearing these last two years, he had lots of bush news to learn. My part in the talk was largely that of silent member, till we had got up to White's and were seated in the dark little "private room" behind the bar, with liquor before us and pipes on the smoke. I took the chance to examine Tony more closely. His name is a name of might from one end of the Queensland interior to the other, He never was more than a passable shearer; his great height prevented that. The wonder was that he could stand the work at all, bent double in the stifling atmosphere of the abominable holes the philanthropic squatter provides for his shearers. Tony, indeed, had determined at last definitely to give it up. He had determined to give it up years and years ago, but these were only samples of the proverbial good intentions which serve the devil for road metal, and must long since have glutted him too. Latterly, however, Tony had not been feeling quite himself, and his heart, he said, was "getting sorter way of leppin' up into the bottom of his throat, and wouldn't hunk out of it for no end of a time," which was a disconcerting habit on the part of the cardiac action of any man. The long and the short of it was, that Tony was going to retire, and was even now "in town"

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(Toowoomba with its single street, post-office, school of arts, and assembly rooms, is "town" to the Darling Downs and back-block shearer) on business connected with a permanent billet. All this Tony related in his slow, quiet way, supplying the commas, semi-colons, and full stops of conversation with puffs of his pipe, though it is to be admitted that his sense of punctuation was not very highly developed. I watched his face. A curious face it was. The brow was broad and well shaped, the eyes of a mild blue, and there were moments when they seemed languid and even expressionless. Ineffable good humour radiated from every feature. There was something comical in the long nose that ended in a brown fleshy bunch tilted a little on one side and a little up. The dark-brown beard with lighter tints of yellowy gold, thick and clipped square at the base of the throat, seemed the visible manifestation of a mind at peace with all men. The red-lipped, insouciant mouth spoke of this, and made the commonplace bushman's oaths quite rich and genial. Tall as he was, he was not the least misshapen. The proportion of parts was well preserved. The fine head was set by a splendid throat on magnificent shoulders and chest. Giants of this sort spring up everywhere, and generally leave the memory behind them of having been henpecked husbands. It made me laugh as I sat there and looked at Tony, to think of him being "run" by some decided little piece of femininity who recognised that this was his inevitable destiny as well as he did himself. To tell you the truth, I thought there was something of that sort in the air now. Perchance, undeterred by squattorial rulings (in some cases the shearers actually themselves sign their acquiescence in them and take the chance of dismissal), Tony had wandered up "in the gloaming," after the shed had knocked off work, and, philandering with the cook and the maids, had lost his heart to some bush Delilah. There was a mild bashfulness and hesitancy about the particulars of that "billet" which made me see more in it than met the eye. "Long Forster" in love was a delicious contingency.

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It was about this point that the conversation began to flag, and, happening to catch Johnson's right eye, I found him slightly closing it at me as a sign of something in the wind.

"Look here, old man," he said to Tony, as if struck by a thought, "When we was up at Hamilton, Acheson and me, we heard a most jammed-up yarn about you and thirteen niggers in a cave there."

Tony looked at his friend with mild astonishment.

"Why, old man," he said, "I remember telling you that yarn up on the Barcoo three years ago."

"Did yer?" said Johnson. "Well, anyway, I forget the particulars of it, and I s'pose you might as well sling it us along again. For Acheson told me he'd very much like to hear it from you."

I reasserted the fact.

Tony seemed to consider it, turning his eyes onto the tablecloth between his two elbows. After a pause he relieved himself of his superfluous saliva onto the floor to the left of him and began slowly but straight away.

"Well," he said, "I've no objecshun to tellin' you that thing, no particular objecshun, considerin' that it's *you* that wants it. But, you know, old man, I'm not *fond* of tellin' it. It sorter harrers a man's feelin's, as you may say, to think of his mate bein' wiped out by them —— niggers, and all unprepared-like, and never a bit of anything to show for it, but just gone, there, right off. In the midst of life," added Tony musingly, "we are in death, and that's the everlastin' truth that the Book says."

Johnson and I acquiesced.

"Well," said Tony, "it happened suthing in this way. You never saw Jimmy Jackson, neither of you, I know it. He died before your time, old man, before you and your governor bust out at one another, and you came out on the Mitchell shearin', and we struck company. But Jimmy Jackson was about as white a sort of man as they make 'em.

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here or anny-weer else, or all over the inhabited airth! He nursed me through the Gulf fever when I was clean off my chump and howlin' round about watercourses and the old brook at home and had to be tied up to a —— tree and—I *know!* We worked together and ate together and chummed it right from the Murray to Carpentaria, and—and I loved him. I didn't make any more bones about it. I knew that chap better than I did myself, and he was right on good, through and through him, and I loved him."

Tony paused to regain his complete composure, looking at the tablecloth as before and pulling at his pipe. The accumulation of saliva having once more been disposed of as before, he proceeded.

"Well, as I was saying," he said, "Jimmy Jackson and me sort of knocked about together all over this bloomin' kolny, and the adjacent kolnies, too—anyway, New South Wales and a bit of South Australia. There was nothing mean or dirty about him. He came out here a boy for his health (his lungs was bad), and he picked up amazin', and I knew him from the first. Well, it happened quite sudden and unexpected, and in this way. It was July—the 21st July, as I know right well—and we was both of us pretty dried up and hungry for a sight of the shears again, and all the boys bending to it, and one chap maybe spinning a song to keep our hearts straight. Them was his own words, Jimmy's words, that very mornin' when he lef' the water-hole. I hear him now. He was always fond of a song, Jimmy."

Another pause.

"Well, it was pleasant humping that time. Pretty cold at nights, of course, and the wind would get through you if you got out from behind your lorg and give it a chance. But it was as dry as a bone, and warm by ten, and clear and invigoratin', as they say. We were skirting round the desert that time. Johnson, you know the desert well, but maybe Mr. Acheson doesn't. You know it isn't a desert all

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sand like. It's quite green, and there's lots of water, and it's the best wooded land in the country, but that there green is all —— spinifex, and if you walk over it you'll bleed yourself to a shadder, and it's death on horses. Well, we was skirtin' round that—sort of making up for Tarradilla, where they allays begin shearin' six weeks afore any one else. That's Tommy Twidle's way, and he's a bit of a crank, but he's the best luck for fine weather in shearin' time of any man in Queensland. The niggers were pretty bad up there that time. I mind once or twice Jimmy and me thought they was after us, and we played up on 'em with the fires."

Tony turned to me to explain.

"You see, the niggers come tumblin' along when they see smoke, and if you got droppin' off to sleep you may reckon to be a deadly goner in no time, as they say in Kanady. So what you do is this: You camp at meal time and does your damper and then leaves the fire burning, and camps for the night further on. And the —— fools go wanderin' round about that fire lookin' for you, and can't make out where the —— you've got to!"

We all laughed.

"Well," Tony proceeded, "that was the way we done that night, and in the mornin' we kem back to the waterhole where the fire'd bin, and filled up all we could, inside and out, for it was an infernil long stage ahead. And then it was Jimmy said that about bein' hungry for a sight of the shears again, and the boys bending to it, and one on 'em in the shed givin' us a warble to keep our hearts straight. I reckon that was about suthin' after six or so, and we set off right away. We kep on at it for several hours without sayin' much, for Jimmy wasn't much of a talker when he had to stump it, and no more was I. You see, Jimmy's weak point was allays his wind, and I've known him to go up a hill—a straight-up, perpendikler hill—in zigzags, like a artful old hoss with a load on."

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Tony paused for a moment, his eyes and face melting with tenderness over this picture of his old mate in the character of an "artful old hoss with a load on."

"Well," he continued, "after a bit we got into loose, sandy soil—heavy walkin'—and sorter quite unconscious, as they say, I got on a bit ahead of Jimmy. You see," said Tony explanatively, "my legs is a bit long, and if I don't keep a heye on them they takes me where I'm not allays prepared for."

We intimated that we understood.

"Onst," he said, "I mind turnin' back and hollarin' out some chaff at him, and he hollared back, and he couldn't have been more'n thirty or forty yards behind, and I turned and kep on agin. I was carryin' more'n Jimmy, and I had the tommyhawk. We'd only one tommyhawk, and Jimmy had a knife. My knife was broke. But we didn't trouble about that. I never yet carried a revolver for the sake of them niggers, and I never shall; they ain't worth it."

"No," said Johnson, "they ain't worth it."

"Well," proceeded Tony, "it was 'bout 'leven, or half past, as I reckon, and I was beginnin' to get a bit like havin' a camp and feed, but I was still keepin' on, goin' along over the sand through the bushes, and thinkin' of nothin' particular, when I began to feel somehow as if I wanted fer to turn round and see Jimmy. I can't tell yer how 't was, but that was the way. So presently round I turns and looks for him, but couldn't seen him, 'count of the bushes. I mind all this as if 'twas yesterday. There wasn't a cloud in the blue, and a cool fresh breeze blowing all the bushes one way. So I stood and looked for him comin' along, and waited and waited, and still he didn't come. So, thinks I to myself, I'll give him a call, and I did. But he didn't answer, and that struck me curous, because the wind was blowin' from me to him. So I called again and let it roll, a regular cooee. But nary a sound out of him. 'That's curous,' thinks I to myself, 'very curous,' and I begins goin'

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back, sorter irresolute, as they say, wondrin' why he didn't answer."

Tony put down his hand with his pipe in it onto the table-cloth, his eyes having a fixed look into the air just in front of him, as if he was looking at what he was describing.

"Well," he said, "I went on back and back, maybe forty yards or maybe fifty, and no show of him anywhire, and then all at onst, as I came round the lee of a big bush, what did I see through a break right ahead of me? Gord, I thought I was dreamin'! There was Jimmy down on the sand with the spears all stickin' out of him, and a mob of infernal niggers, like a swarm of ants, pullin' his swag to pieces and riflin' his incensit corpus. It made me blood run cold, and I just stood a minute like a blausted pelikin, gapin' at 'em. Then I reconised it all, and I puts down my swag on the sand there, lookin' at 'em all the while, and I takes out the tommyhawk, holdin' it well for runnin', and I comes on right straight for 'em like a cat on her belly after a mouse. I reckon they was fifty or sixty yards off, but I'd not got ten afore one of the devils spotted me, and he shouts out "How, how, how!" and all the others stopped and took to lookin' at me. That got me clean wild, that did, and I just give a sorter whoop, and swung up the tommyhawk and rushed at 'em."

Tony was transfigured—his huge trunk, erect and swelling, supported his great strained throat, and made him, as it seemed to me, something like a gigantic python. His eyes glared, his lips drew back from his bristling teeth.

"There was thirteen of 'em," he said, "men and gins, and I wanted the whole lot. I wasn't goin' to stop till I had 'um. Strike me dead, but every —— fiend of that push had to die for it. I knew it! And, by Gord, so did they! The whole lot just slewed round and took off, jabbering like mad, into the scrub. If I'd gone right for 'um, they'd 've split up and some of 'um 'd got away. I didn't run my

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hardest. I kep' on after 'um, driving 'um all afore me, every now and then givin' 'm a whoop to tell 'um they was to go on. It was like drivin' wild hosses into a snare. They'd got the fear o' Gord in 'um. I knew they'd keep together right on, and they did. They went for their waterhole."

He paused a moment.

"I never saw that waterhole afore; I never knew of it. When all at onst I couldn't hear 'em on ahead o' me, and broke out into a bit of a dry gully, I knew I'd never seen it afore. But I knew I had 'um all there; I knew it as well's could be. There was a cave. The waterhole was right in the rock—worn out, a pocket, just off where the stream went—a sorter back-water. Then a ledge. Along the ledge a bit of a pad. And then a black hole, and that was the cave. I couldn't stop to go along the ledge. I took a run and came smash in, doubled up, into the cave, onto the very top of the whole pile. None of 'em made a sound, except a low sorter whimperin' like blind pups. I caught hold of one by the neck with my hand and lugged him out and smashed his skull in with a blow of the tommyhawk. Then I reached in and got hold of another. It was a gin, and I gripped her by the leg and pulled her out, and 'bout broke her head off with a crack on the back of the neck. Then I laid hold on another one and smashed his skull in like the first one. And all the while I was reachin' in and pullin' 'em out they never made a sound, but kept up that sorter wimperin' like pups when the mother's gone. I killed the whole lot. There was thirteen of 'um. I counted."

There was a pause, a long and complete pause.

"Well," said Tony, suddenly softening, his eyes getting an extraordinary wild, sad look, "and then I went back to Jimmy. They'd done him. They'd finished him right off. He'd never speak to me again any more. He'd not said good-bye to me—nary a word at all, nary a hand-shake—but gone right away from me for ever and ever and ever,

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wiped out by them damned niggers—Jimmy Jackson, my mate—Jimmy!"

Slowly the tears welled up to his eyes and overflowed, streaming down his face. He bent his head down into his arms on the table, and his great body shook to his sobs. And there we sat in the dark little "private room" behind the hotel bar, silently looking at him.

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THE LAST OF THE BUSH-RANGERS.

THREE leaves torn from life, these contain my tale. The periods are separate. In only one of them does the protagonist appear and speak and act. As it were a prologue and epilogue with the culminating situation shown forth between them. Thus the winter's day will open in mist, which slowly rolls away, and light and heat rule supreme. Then the sun sets, and once more the mist arising covers all things. And as it is with the day in nature, so it is with the day in your life and in mine; yea, so it is with the total of our existence; for birth is darkness, and death is darkness, and only life is light.

MORNING.

Four men were seated on the bench which Kirby of the Shearers' Arms—more thoughtful than any other publican of the township of Hamilton—caused to be put out each morning under the veranda against the wall by the bar windows. There the four men sat, gratefully sunning themselves, this early June morning, reading the latest-arrived

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newspaper, watching the occasional passers, or discussing things generally. Stretching away to right and left was the one broad street of the township with its three cross-streets and irregularly scattered wooden stores and houses. Right in front, bordering the township, ran the creek bank with its fringe of breathless trees, all soaked in the light of the sun and the cloudless blue of the heavens. There was no sound of life except the regular shrieky cry of the circular saw of the saw-mill as it cut through the logs, and this was mellowed by the distance (the mill was at the other end of the township) and the slight but steadily adverse wind. The paper was stale and the passers-by few, and, when the interesting topic of Jim Mills was started, the attention of the whole four concentrated itself. The first of these, the man with the paper, O'Keefe—generally known as Paddy—was a man of fifty-five or so, and a fixture at the Arms. He had taken up land "'way back" in the old times, made a little money, and had now retired to lie about and smoke and yarn, occasionally taking his friend Kirby's place at the bar, and otherwise making himself obliging and useful. The next was a tall, handsome, bearded, indolent young fellow, Kirby's brother, and another standing-dish at the Arms. He was the unhappy possessor of a bit of land from his dead mother, the proceeds of which enabled him to hang about and loaf and occasionally "go on the bust." The third was a young man, slight and loose in structure and with evident signs of itinerancy on him; in fact, his swag and billy lay on a liquor case in the bar. He was a stranger. The fourth was a short stout man, evidently a township tradesman. This was Axthelm, the chemist, an Australianised German, who took his meals at the Arms, and was wont to shut up his shop from time to time and go off for a drink and a yarn. They were all feeling the pleasant effects of digestion in the somnolent sunlight.

"Jim Mills?" said Paddy, looking up from his paper. "What's that you're saying about Jim?"

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The stranger turned his face and replied:

"He and his mate Pilsbury 've bin cavortin' round Hilburn way. They've stuck up Donaldson of Rosehill. I was clerking the stores on the station."

Paddy sat with his face held immovably, curiously suggestive of a grey-haired sea-animal. His upper lip and chin were shaven and he had patches of white bristle sticking out from his throat. He was rather slow of comprehension.

There was a pause.

"Well," he said suddenly, jerking his head, "and a good job too. I tell you," he continued, raising his voice. "I tell you I knew Jim Mills when he wan't that high"—(he held his swollen wrinkly hand down towards the ground)—"and I know all about him!"

The stranger, ordinarily pretty effusive, was impressed by Paddy's dramatic manner.

"Donaldson's not a bad chap," he said, rather diffidently. "It's that —— Davis, the overseer, that's the matter. He's—" (but here the language became unreportable, though delivered and accepted in quite a matter-of-fact way, of course)—"he's for ever sacking some one. Last he shot out was Jonnie Holmes, and Monday evening he shot *me* out, and I've just got to hump my swag to Hamilton, to the line [the railway line], and look out for another billet."

"Look here," said Paddy, uncompromisingly. "I'm just straight agin squatters, all the pot and bilin' of them. What's the good of saying' it's not Donaldson's fault? Davis grinds down every man that puts foot on Rosehill. Donaldson knows it alright, and who gets the coin, eh? Why, they've fought the Union for under a pound a hundred no less'n three times, and got beat every time, and they'll try it again, by gum, they'll try it again!"

There was another pause. Paddy's oracular outbursts almost always produced one.

"Jim Mills," said Kirby, his awkward, meaningless, semi-

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smile deepened with a knowing look in his eyes, "has a bit of a down on Donaldson, they say."

"Dot is zo," observed Axthelm gravely. "I haf heardt it. A man toes not forget dot sort off ting—a womman—he toes not forget tit!"

"Who told you Jim Mills had stuck up Donaldson?" asked Paddy of the stranger. The old man seemed to doubt that the evidence was at first hand.

"Well," replied the other, with the same diffidence, "I had it off a chap who'd been at the station on Monday evening. He caught me up at Mother Muir's" (a road-side pot-house ten or twelve miles out of Hamilton). "He said it came off just about sunset. Donaldson was out in the billabong paddock, walking, with his gun, alone. Pilsbury stuck him up. He had his six-shooter on him before Donaldson saw. Mills came out a little way off. He didn't say anything. Donaldson parted up twelve or thirteen shillings he happened to have, and the gun and his watch and chain, and the two went off."

"I call that cunnin'!" said Paddy in his loud slightly sarcastic tone. "I do—cunnin'! I knew Jim Mills well. I knew all about him, and I say he'd no cause agin Donaldson, though you all seem to be so cocksure of it, and always is!"

"Well, Paddy," said Kirby, to whom this point as a discussion was familiar, and who was bent on 'drawing' his old friend for the fun of it, "you can't get over the facks. Jim was engaged to marry Mary Paton; all Hamilton knew it. And Donaldson used to go and see Mrs. Paton pretty often, and it wasn't surely Mrs. Paton he went for? Likewise there's no denyin' Mary Paton was seen with him out in the evening along the Hilburn road, and then she wrote and broke it off with Jim, and the two of them went down to Brisbane, and there they are now, and by all accounts there's no denyin' Donaldson visits them, and Jack Thurston when he went down last March with a mob of horses to

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Brisbane, he swore he saw Donaldson coming out of their house at——"

"Look 'ere," said Paddy, with one of his quick movements, jerking his head round and fixing his face in a new motionless pose, "Donaldson's bad enough other ways, and I ain't defendin' him for his own sake! But what's Jack Thurston or anythin' *he* says? Yes, you may tell him so, if you want, and that *I* say it. And about Mary Paton and Mrs. Paton and Donaldson, I tell you I *know*, and it was all square and above-board. Mrs. Paton was an old servant of the family, of Donaldson's father—in fack she was Donaldson's nurse and foster mother, too, when his mother died, and everyone knows it, barrin' ignirint fools, and he stood by her in her trouble with the shop and set her up in Brisbane where she'd 've a bit more of a chance, and that's all about it."

Kirby looked at Axthelm and winked, continuing the wink to the stranger, together with more of his awkward meaningless smile. Axthelm nodded and looked down. Paddy and Mrs. Paton, the widow store-woman with the one daughter, the prettiest girl in Hamilton, had been cronies, and it was pretty generally received that Paddy's view of the relations of the duo with Donaldson of Rosehill was not so charitable for the mere sake of Donaldson.

"They tell me," said the stranger, breaking the pause, "as how it was Twidle of Tarradilla as set Jim Mills and Pilsbury on the bush-ranging lay first."

"Well," said Paddy, "and they tell you the truth, and if ever you get a chance of busting up that —— bandicoot Twidle, don't you lose it, young feller."

"Mills and Pilsbury comes from these parts, don't they?" asked the stranger.

"They were both born and bred in this township," said Paddy, "and we all of us know 'um well, don't us?"

Kirby and Axthelm murmured assent.

"Jim," proceeded Paddy rather severely and in his loud public tone, "was born and bred in this township, and so was

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Pilsbury, and no one ever had anything to say agin 'um that *I* ever heerd on. I tell you, I know 'um both well, and their fathers and mothers afore 'um, and they was all as honest and above-board a lot as you please. I tell you, I remember the day they two boys left Hamilton, and went and took up that selection out of Tarradilla run as well as if it was yesterday. And it was all a square deal right through And I remember the day they came in here with Twidle and some of his —— dead beats off Tarradilla with a small mob of the mangiest merinos that ever went to the butcher for scrap meat—and the lot of 'um sayin' they'd caught Jim and Tom Pilsbury with the sheep the night before, driving 'um on past Hilburn, the Lord hisself only knows where! And I talked it all over with the boys, and it was a put-up job from start to finish, I say, though five of the —— liars swore it through in court—and I was there too and heard 'um—and the boys got twelve months for it. Why, you don't suppose that was the first time Twidle or any other —— squatter who'd had his run cut up got playing that game, do you? I've been from one end of these col'nies to the t'other—from Melbourne up to the Gulf—and I've never seen any other game but that when a squatter wanted to break a man." Paddy paused for breath. (Sometimes he suffered rather severely from asthma, and his "wind" powers were dubious.)

"That's true enough," said Kirby, with a shake of his head, Axthelm following acquiescent suit in his own manner.

"Look 'ere," proceeded Paddy, "I say it was a put-up job from start to finish and I said it inside the court and outside the court, and I've said it ever since and never cared who heard it! Why, what was it drove Webb to bush-ranging down in the New South Wales Riverina above the Murray? Ned knew him well—old Ned out at Cowan's—and he told me it was just the same with Webb. Webb (his name was John Webb) had a selection up by a squatter's by the name of Carter—two of 'um, father and

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son—and they played up on him with their stolen sheep and got him up to Mamerie to the assizes and broke him, and he followed up young Carter and fought him fair with knives and killed him, and a good job too. That's the only justice you'll ever get with a squatter," he added, lifting and shaking his head defiantly.

"And what justice is that, Paddy?" asked Kirby, who saw Paddy expected his reply to be led up to.

"The justice you takes yourself!" said Paddy.

The three listeners all murmured applause and agreement.

"And what was it," asked Paddy, after a pause, returning on himself, "that drove Ned Kelly to it? and Morgan, too? It's all very well to put it onto the police and their persecution of 'um, but who put the police onto 'um, I want to know? Who put the police onto 'um? Why, there isn't a poor man from Melbourne up to Burketown, who isn't a new chum or a —— town shopman, who doesn't know what Bushranging's meant these twenty years and what drives chaps to it."

Three or four men entering the shade of the far end of the hotel balcony at this point diverted the others' attention a little. One of these men called out:

"The coach's just coming in past the common."

The arrival of the Hilburn coach and the Brisbane train are the two events of the day at Hamilton, and a small crowd is always wont to assist at both. The Arms not being the mail hotel (the Crown is the mail hotel), the whole group of men joined and passed over the street, chatting together, the subject of the two young bushrangers still uppermost. To all of them, it was evident, Mills and Pilsbury were not only rather heroes for their courage and success, but also, as it were, retributive representatives of their class against the class above it. Paddy continued his monologue and diatribe under the veranda of the Crown as they stood together with some ten or fifteen more watch-

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ing the small red Cobb's coach, drawn by its two lank horses, rolling in a cloud of dust over the common and into the top of the street. The little crowd gathered round Paddy and listened with that solemn silence peculiar to a country crowd which listens to the earnest exposition of opinions with which it does not disagree. As the coach came closer, however, this other interest drew some away, and presently Paddy fell silent. Though he was excited, he was quite calm and apparently unmoved.

"Well, John," he called out cheerily to a friend who was sitting up on the box next the driver, as the coach rumbled up and the dust-cloud floated forward in rolling volumes, "what's the news from Hilburn?"

"The news?" shouted back John, a lean, tall man with a long straggly beard, "Why, it's nothing *but* news! Jim Mills and Tom Pilsbury 've stuck up Donaldson of Rosehill on Monday evening, and bailed up the manager and the two clerks of the Australian Bank at Hilburn at about midnight, and cleared with over five hundred in notes and gold!"

The sensation was immense. For a few moments no one even in the coach made any movement, but all stood or sat still, amazed and wondering. Then ensued a scene of confusion. The three outside and two inside passengers got down and were at once surrounded by eager knots of questioners. The news spread like wildfire. The whole sleepy little township was on the run in less than five minutes, and the Crown was thronged within and without. Presently Paddy and Kirby, carrying their friend John's luggage, broke out into the street and made over towards the Arms, a small crowd following. The diffuse but diffident stranger was enjoying a little audience of his own at the far end of the veranda, stating how he was the first to bring in the news about Donaldson early this morning, and declaring that he had also reported about the sticking up of the bank. He gave details which gradually grew and grew, and were eagerly absorbed by the sympathising listeners. Paddy's

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laughter could be heard ringing in the street as he stumped along, and at last he waved his arm and gave a bit of a cheer.

"There," he said, "what about *that?* Stuck up the bank and cleared with five hundred? If the boys 'll only keep clear of the line, we'll see the squatters and the —— bank managers dancing a rale Oirish tsjig yet before they doi!"

Everyone laughed and applauded.

NOON.

THE two men had been riding in silence for some time, the one somewhat in front of the other, each with his second led horse by him. They were thirty or forty miles on the far side of Hilburn, making for Tarradilla, skirting the spinifex desert. They were both evidently quite young men; neither had much more of a beard than a bristly fluff on jaw and side-cheek. In every other respect they were quite different. The first of them, the leader, had a fine, resolute face—broad, round brow, straight nose, coral lips, and steel-blue eyes. The jaw and chin were round also, but occasionally the one grew straight and rigid and the other rigid and peaked in a manner expressive of great strength of desire and will. He rode, too, upright and with decision, not in the loose, slouching style of the average bushman, the equine land-sailor. He had a fine blood horse under him, and felt it with pleasure. His companion was the sort of man one meets everywhere up country—the average bushman, in a word. His face was thinner than usual, but not even hunger and hardship could take from it its expression of kindly honesty and good humour. He had not an expressive feature. Nature had passed her hand over his face and flattened and

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pushed it all together. As they rode on in silence, the one's fine, frowning countenance seemed charged with thought; the other was simply plunged in a more or less stupid dream.

"Tom," said the leader suddenly.

Tom started; gave his horse a walloping dig in the ribs with his broad spurred heel, and came up abreast.

"Yes, Jim," he said.

There was a pause.

Then:

"I'm not sure," said Mills thoughtfully, "whether we'd better go right on to Tarradilla, and do the job this time, after all."

Pilsbury was surprised.

"Why," he said, "hadn't you'd made up your mind to give it to Twidle anyway—more even than sticking up Donaldson and the bank?"

Mills expected this, but had been too deeply engaged in thought to trouble about having any plausible answer ready.

"We'll be there before the news of us," continued Pilsbury, repeating more or less unconsciously the other's own phrase in planning the adventure.

"Yes," said Mills, his face brightening a little, "but we'll have to hang about a bit before we get in, and there are a good many men in the place and they've guns and six-shooters, and they'll stick by that Twidle, too. You see, if they get the country up ahead of us before we are right out, we'll be cut off and kopped. We're not safe anywhere near Eaglewood, though we've cut the wires from Hamilton. There's the other telegraph from Panana runs right through Eaglewood out west. Eaglewood's a junction of the two, and they can wire down on the other side from Hamilton to Brisbane, and up to Eaglewood again and right out to Winton. I think we'd better go straight ahead to the telegraph line between Eaglewood and Winton and cut it. Then we're safe out, and can look about a bit."

He was smiling, almost laughing, to himself. He was

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thinking of a talk of his several years ago with two or three of his Hamilton friends when he had emphatically stated that he believed a man could still work the bushranging game if he only knew how. He had thought to himself at the time that *he* knew how, if he were ever driven to it. And now things had driven him to it, and he had made his first big *coup*, the road was clear, and the illimitable wilderness lay in front of him. But on the success of his first scheme had followed the idea of a second scheme, and this did not include an attack on Twidle. In Eaglewood, a little further on, and again at Winton, due west of Eaglewood both places as well known to Pilsbury as to himself, two more *coups*, equally big, lay ready to hand if only they pushed on quickly, and got there before news of the Hilburn bank affair. Mills had a soul above mere personal revenge. Pilsbury's reflections during those ten odd months in gaol were almost entirely of this sort. The two had agreed before the trial that if they were heavily sentenced, and the selection had to "go bung" (as in all probability it would have), they would make Twidle pay for it when they got out. Pilsbury's vengeful thoughts were directed against Twidle and the entire order of squatters, which appeared to him to include prosecuting counsel and judge and indeed almost everyone concerned. To Pilsbury the policemen and warders were just as much class traitors and the paid tools of the squatters in hounding down his friend and himself as Twidle's men, the witnesses at the trial, were. To Mills the issue had grown broader. He had, at first, felt promptings to revenge even more keenly than the other, but a man has time to cool down in ten months spent in gaol, and Mills had cooled down rapidly. His thoughts after a time had taken another turn. He thoroughly disliked drudgery, and the task of chopping down, burning, clearing, and fencing, the selection was drudgery of the most disgusting sort. It suited Pilsbury. Indeed it was because Mills had felt this so acutely that he had seen the immense gain there would be in having Pilsbury as his partner. To

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hew down trees from morning till night, and sweat at erecting chop-and-block fences, seemed to Mills a terrible waste of energy in a man of brains. This sort of thing you can get a muscular fat-head to do at a pound or twenty-five shillings an acre for you. If he had known how, he would have worked elsewhere, and paid a man to do this other work for him. But the time when they took up the section was the shearers' off season—the "July fog," in fact—and when he was once up there with Pilsbury, he felt he might as well go through with it. Thus the selection had begun to get knocked into something like shape; one or two paddocks held cattle and sheep; and he had resigned himself to the slow and steady method. Mills was a man with ideas of his own on cattle, sheep, and all sorts of farming, and he held theories on crop-growing which he had imbibed from his uncle, a well-known nursery gardener of Toowoomba, very much in advance of those generally current in his class. The result of this so far had not been very striking—a sentence of twelve months for sheep-stealing—a ruined or semi-ruined selection—a stuck-up squatter, several hundreds of pounds in notes and gold from a powerful bank, and two young men riding on stolen blood horses in the centre of a district surrounded with railway and telegraph lines. All this went flashing through Mills' mind as they rode along in the silence that followed on his last remark. He admitted to himself that his first attempt at the quick and sure method, the handing over, namely, of several hundred of Twidle's sheep to an enterprising friend who was to disappear inland with the same, had not been a success. But that was because he had tried to combine it with Pilsbury's method, the other method, and it was Pilsbury's fault that they had been caught. When he had trusted to himself entirely and used the other merely as a tool, the success had been, at any rate in the achievement of the scheme laid, a success as instantaneous as it was brilliant. Jim's eyes were now fixed resolutely on the next

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step ahead, and he saw, with an exultant eagerness, the next that followed on it. He saw himself landing on American soil with £500 or £600, perhaps £1000, behind him, and a career before him of which chopping, clearing and fencing scrub was not a part.

They rode together in silence for some time, till Pilsbury, obeying the vague indolence which was natural to him, once more fell a little to the rear. Right in front of them was a small hill, one of those sombre bristling ridges which more than anything else give so much to Australian scenery that ominous aspect by day and that ghastly aspect in the dimmer lights of dawn and eve which make so much of its sinister charm. A blue-grey mist seemed to hang about the ridge, the exhalation of the dark-leaved glazy pungent foliage of the gums. All round the horizon the cloudless sky lay in a white band like dispersed smoke, graduating through every stage of blue to the radiant ultramarine of the zenith. Both of them knew well where they were. In another hour or so they would be camping at the waterhole at Long Forster's Cave. This waterhole was one of a small string that lay along the course of the deepest, which was also the central, gully of the ridge. The ridge was a rude semicircle, and one of its folds or creases, worn down to the level of the solid rock by the violent erosion of the fierce intermittent rainfall, formed the principal issue of its water-shed. The deepest pool of all, and that which lasted furthest into the droughts, was just by the cave, circular in shape and to any eye but that of a bushman distinctly fetid in character. Up above it, in the sparse earth that covered the great rock-slabs, two stunted sheak trees, bowed by the wind which tyrannised over their insecure root-hold, sharded off into and round the pool their dark and bitter needles. A little way back and above the pool there was a narrow natural ledge which led along to the well-known cave where the gigantic bushman had found his huddled human prey and dragged out and tomahawked the whole thirteen of them, flinging their

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carcases back into the black crevice to be torn and gorged by the kites and crows, the iguanas and dingoes who crowded up to the feast. Signs of their handiwork of dismemberment and dispersal were apparent to the two men the moment that, riding down the dry broad watercourse which much resembled one of those causeway roads made by the ancient extinct peoples, they came round the bend that led up to this last platform. Thence the waters were wont to dash themselves in a magnificent cascade into the second channelled course below. Shreds and flakes of white dry bone shone out clearly from the dry, dusty black of the level stratified rock, and one skull with a great rent in its bleached top—the lower jaw gone—grinned with its level teeth on the edge of the ledge. It seemed to have been placed there. The two had struck the gully a little too high up, and had descended. Jim's eyes dwelt on the curious scene with a moody brooding glance from under frowning brows. Pilsbury disliked the place and had protested against coming there, but the other had quietly ridden in that direction and his friend of course followed. Had they been going on to Tarradilla, as they had at first intended, they would have struck another waterhole, the waterhole from which Forster and Jackson had started on the day of Jackson's murder by the blacks. This waterhole was round the right spur of the ridge, but since Mills had made up his mind to go straight towards Eaglewood and cut the telegraph line towards the east of it, they would pass to the right round the left spur. There was no water between here and the township. The buzzing of two or three blow-flies, distinctly audible in the breathless, quiet, sunny corner of the waterhole which, as Long Forster had surmised, was a back-water, gave Pilsbury a sort of creepy, unpleasant sensation, and when his eyes fell on a little shepherd's-companion, flirting his long, black wedge-tail and skipping about chirping and warbling on the ledge, apparently attracted by their arrival, he wondered in a dull way to himself what brought the genial, sociable bird

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there to such a shambles? Jim at this point shot out his long, straight leg and came to ground. The horses, who had paused and with ears pricked and moving seemed to be listening, began to stir again, their hoofs sounding on the rock. Pilsbury dismounted too, and in a few moments they were making ready for their frugal meal and rest. Jim took away the four horses, while the other began collecting dead leaves, twigs, and branches for the small fire they thought it safe to make. He brought them to a spot below the waterhole, together with two round worn stones from a pile of such in a small basin immediately under the drop that made the cascade. While collecting these, he picked up and tossed away down into the lower platform away out of the watercourse the bits of bone which were lying round. At last, being now alone, he contemplated the skull for a moment, and then, taking it up with a certain amount of reverence (after all, it was a man's) bowled it down past the lower platform into a little dell, where it rolled and settled itself amid branching fern and maiden-hair. Almost immediately a large carpet-snake, the innocuous boa, raised himself beside it and made off with a rustle through the chequered light and shade of the undergrowth. Pilsbury watched him a moment, and then turned for a look into the darknesses of the cave. Indistinct white things were certainly perceptible on the ground, and he would really sooner have had them away, though it was high noon and in another hour he would have left them far behind. The days of internecine warfare with the blacks were over for ever in these parts, and Pilsbury had grown up with a milder feeling towards the vanishing and subject race. The average bushman of the older generation would have as much thought of being troubled with the ghosts of slaughtered blacks as of slaughtered kangaroos, but with Pilsbury this was not so, and the terrific story of Long Forster's vengeance had made him feel uncomfortable in his boyhood and was making him feel uncomfortable now when for the first time in his life he

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viewed the scene of it. He turned to the pile of fuel, and having arranged the stones for the billy, set it alight. He did not know it, but at that moment Mills was standing on the rock above him, opposite the cave, regarding him with that look of scornful dislike with which strong natures are wont at times to regard those whom they consider weak, foolish and useless. It had occurred to Mills as he led the horses to the little shallow fetid pool which he had noticed higher up the water-course, that it was really quite a question whether Pilsbury would be of any use to him in his dash on Eaglewood. As the horses stood with repugnant nostrils sucking in the green-scummed water, he thought of this at length. It was Pilsbury who got them caught with the sheep from Tarradilla. It was Pilsbury, he knew, who would get them caught (if they were to be caught) at the present game. It was manifest that the chances of danger would be increased a thousandfold if he attempted to get Pilsbury with him down to one of the sea-coast towns, and away by steamer to the South and to America. And then men of the type of Pilsbury exist everywhere as tools for superior intelligences, and why have a Pilsbury who would go halves with you in your little stock of capital, rather than one who would take what you chose to give him? Mills hobbled the horses and came back along the left bank of the gully. What was to be done at Eaglewood he could do himself, and assuredly, while the troopers and the squatters were looking for the two of them, to enter Gladstone or Rockhampton alone, transform his appearance, and escape in the rear, with the fools all looking for him in the front, would be a master-stroke as brilliant as it was safe. It gave him real pleasure to think of the audacity and skill of it. After all, to become a professional bushranger would be but a sorry trade in the long run. Mills was a young man who had made his reflections on life, and who very clearly perceived that the evident end thereof was pleasure. There was in him an element of love of adventure for its own sake, and he felt the attraction of

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the barbaric picturesque. But, after all, there was something asinine, in this year of grace and secular public school education, in not running things for what they were worth. If bush-ranging could be made to pay—that is to say, to offer a more pleasurable and lucrative career than the wretched drudgery of starting and working a selection—then by all means he would be a bushranger, and the picturesque part of the affair should be enjoyed and utilised to the full. But to merely follow in the lines of the old Anglo-Australian bushrangers—thick-headed desperadoes like Morgan, or Kelly, or Webb—was manifestly behind the times. This was all Pilsbury's idea of it. Pilsbury found pleasure in "going on the bust" when he had the chance, and was no more particularly choice in his worship of Venus than of Bacchus. To him sticking up Donaldson of Rosehill a couple of miles from his own station-house, was an "exploit." To Mills it was merely part of the sensational stock-in-trade of bushranging. He bore Donaldson no good-will. He believed that it was Donaldson who had induced Mary Paton to throw him over. Mary was a beautiful simple girl who looked upon going to church as the happiest experience of everyday life, and she grew more and more frightened and repelled as Jim's strong and cynical views on things became apparent to her. Well, he let Pilsbury have his way, and they stuck up Donaldson, and it amused him. It would have amused him to stick up Twidle of Tarradilla, and give him a good thrashing afterwards, but the reflection of that second uncut line to Eaglewood from the east and the warning of the place of the Hilburn bank "exploit" (an exploit that brings in hard cash to such a gratifying extent is worth calling one!) had made him renounce the Tarradilla affair at once.

He came out of the bush onto the rock above Pilsbury, and stood for a few minutes looking at him. If Mills had only thought out the whole thing in gaol (as he admitted he ought to have done), he would not now be considering

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how he could best get rid of his friend. Moreover, there could be no doubt that halving proceeds is a most unsatisfactory system, particularly if you happen to think it is you that have justly earned the lion's share. And even Pilsbury would scarcely agree to a division and separation, receiving all those bundles of beautiful, crackly, or brown leathery odoriferous bank-notes, which were worth to them something like a hundredth of their nominal value. Mills laughed grimly to himself and turned away into the bushes again. Pushing his way along, he turned off to the left, intending to come out on the lower platform of the watercourse and climb up. All at once something rose before him and went right away ahead. It was a paddy-melon. His revolver was in its case in his belt—a full-sized Colt, a little rifle. The paddy-melon went sailing swiftly along through the perpendicular stems into a more open part forty or fifty yards off on the other side of the watercourse. The evil instinct of destruction rose in him. He pulled out the revolver, took aim and fired. The ping of the explosion and the bullet sounded, as he thought to himself:

"It would be as easy to give him a piece of lead as the paddy-melon."

The paddy-melon held straight on, but at a mad pace, for another fifteen yards, and then at the end of a bound suddenly fell right onto the top of his head. Jim put back his revolver, came out onto the platform, and climbed up to Pilsbury, who was lying comfortably watching him.

"My eye, Jim," he said, "you can use a revolver! That beggar's eighty yards off, if he's a step."

Jim assented and came on to the fire. A thin thread of smoke oozed out of the top of the unbuttoned leather revolver-case and clung round it in the still hot air. He stretched himself lengthwise near the fire and lapsed into gloominess. Pilsbury thought of old boyish days when the two of them used to practise at a kerosine-tin out in Cowan's first paddock.

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"Why haven't you taken off that billy?" asked Mills suddenly.

The truth was that Pilsbury did not like taking water from that water-hole. He had vague ideas of shreds of bone in a paste of mud, dead sheak leaves, and a black clotted substance of a character better unspecified. He had intended going up to the other water-hole. Something of this was in his face, and Mills saw it.

He brought out an angry oath. What followed occurred with indescribable rapidity. Pilsbury felt like a flash that it was coming, though without the faintest idea of its cause, and instinctively made a move to leap aside, and another to get his right hand round over his hip. It was useless. The bullet struck him full in the left side, and knocked him over backwards with up-flung arms. He fell with his head lolled right down over the edge of the platform. There was a faint trickle of dust from the rocky bank behind him. The little shepherd's-companion rose with a startled call into the intense blue over the great, brown, protruding rock. Jim, with cruel, closing eyes, leant on his left elbow, the revolver drooping in his right hand, and considered his handiwork. The paddy-melon and Pilsbury had each received their piece of lead.

NIGHT.

THE Brisbane jury returned with their verdict, and the sentence was pronounced late in the afternoon. Most of the large crowd which had gathered outside the court in George Street and Ann Street did not disperse, but remained in knots and groups discussing the affair. Some were determined to get a sight of the prisoner as he passed into the

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police van, and these drew round the well-known doorway marked "Private" in the wall of the court in Ann Street. Ann Street, passing through George Street and ending at the North Quay and the river, has this last small block taken up on the left hand with the court gardens, and on the other with an hotel building and several unkempt allotments, used as stable-yards or else vacant, piled with rubbish heaps and encumbered with dusty city vegetation. Here the crowd was assembled in the bright, mild, sunset light, which lit up the tall, big, white stone buildings of the court, leaving most of the rest of the block in shadow. The river flowed silently by, with its slow eddies, as the tide grew to the ebb, and the noise of the city traffic passing over the vibrating bridge made itself heard from time to time. The crowd was a silent one. Here and there the knots and groups still kept up desultory discussion, but the feeling of awe and expectancy, the shadow, as it were, of that ruthless deed, and the mingled feelings with which they awaited a glimpse of its perpetrator, kept them all vaguely depressed. Indeed, the actual shadow in which many of them stood was felt, in a vague instinctive sort of way, as some symbol or expression of that other spiritual shadow—just as a man, walking down from the crest of the warm, sunny upper lands into the damp, dark chill of some swampy gully, shivers and feels the passage from light and life into darkness and death. Those who spoke spoke without interest, as people in a theatre speak when the curtain is about to rise on some thrilling drama. The curtain on this occasion was represented by that door in the wall, marked "Private," in front of which two or three policemen were keeping a space clear down to the big, black, polished, two-horsed van, with its visible ventilation holes for the cells inside, its double-clamped door, its perches for the conductors. The opening of the wall door, and the closing of the van door, would constitute the entry and exit of the protagonist, the chief actor of this last scene of the second great act of crime, trial and condem-

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nation. There was one exception in the way of the general inattention of both speakers and audience. Almost directly opposite the door a small but enlargening group was gathered round a tall man, who, one could see at a glance, was an up-country man in his Sunday clothes. He was standing with his back to the wood fence that enclosed the end allotment. On the top bar of this were seated, on either side of him, two or three men, who had formed the original instalment of his audience. Others had now gathered round him from all sides, and they all listened with eager and respectful attention.

"Yes," said the man, lifting up his face a little, and looking vaguely from one to another, "it was my evidence hung him—mine and Frank Johnson's. Frank Johnson's my mate."

No one ventured a remark, but the attention grew in intensity. The name of Johnson, the chief witness at the trial, acted like a spell.

"Well, you've seen the papers, I suppose?" he continued; "and you know what me and Johnson bore witness to? We said all we'd got to say, and every mortal word of it was the truth."

He paused again, and there was a general murmur of acquiescence and encouragement to proceed. It was evident that he was about to open out on his plain, unvarnished tale, and only wanted time to develop his means of expression in the leisurely manner peculiar to people to whom time is habitually no object.

"The way it kem about," he said, with a long inhalation, "was this. Me and Johnson 're shearers. Johnson's the best shearer in Queensland. He've bet the record over and over agin. He done 198 in six hours and a-hef, at Rosehill, last year; and he done 201 at Isis Downs last year but one; and there's none a patch on him in all Australia but Finch of Dubbo, in New South Wales. Well, he's my mate, as I say, and we're shearers, and we was journey'n together from Hamilton to Tarradilla to the sheds. P'raps you fellers mayn't

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know where Hamilton *is?*" At this point there was a slight movement in the crowd, and a quivering but loud voice said; "*Ham*ilton!" but subsided, thanks to the remonstrances of a friend who was accompanying its owner, and of those immediately surrounding. This owner of the peculiar voice was a small, old man, in a white slouching suit of dittos, and with a low brown hat with the top thrust up. His upper lip and chin were shaven, and he had patches of white bristle sticking out from his throat. He stood now with his face raised, and his eyes fixed on the speaker, every faculty intent on gathering what the man had to say. Something wistful and pathetic, as of inner trouble and distress, made him more suggestive of a grey-haired sea-animal than ever. His friend, who carried his arm in a sling (the result, with an evanescent black eye, of his latest "bust"), was as easy recognisable. Tall, good-looking, bearded, and carrying his natural indolence on every feature, young Kirby had a certain air about him to-day as if (despite his own physical misadventure) he were here to look after poor old Paddy, which humanised him more than ordinarily.

"Listen to him," he went on, *sotto voce*, to Paddy. "That's Perkins! Let's hear what he's got to say *out*side."

Perkins meantime, undisturbed beyond the slow repetition of his original inquiry as to whether perchance the present company was ignorant of the geographical position of the important bush township of Hamilton, proceeded calmly:

"Hamilton's on the line back from Too'mba, the nearest railway station to Rosehill. That's Donaldson's place." (It was evident that he thought they must all know Donaldson.) "Hilburn's past Rosehill, and Taradilla's past Hilburn agin, and on the other side there's Eaglewood, and Winton to the west agin. The telegrapht comes up from Brisbane to Eaglewood and Winton, and the spinifex desert is atween 'em and Tarradilla station, Twidle's place. That was wheer me and Johnson was go'n. Well, we was rid'n. I was rid'n one of Johnson's horses—he'd leant it me; I'd bin

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a bit down on my luck and hadn't one of my own." The apologetic tone in which this was said bore a distant allusion to "knocked-down cheques" and vicarious "busts," which was, vaguely but none the less actually, apprehended by the audience.

Paddy, whose hearing had been temporarily impaired by a recent cold in the head and attack of asthma, turned his face somewhat so as to bring his right (his best) ear into the line of speech, and listened intently.

"Well," proceeded Perkins, "as I was say'n, me and Johnson was rid'n from Hamilton to Tarradilla. Leastwiys, if I didn't say it, that's what I *meant* to say, anyhow. Twidle of Tarradilla, he begins shear'n afore anyone else, and that's what took me and Johnson that way so airly for shear'n. Well, p'raps some on yer knows the lay of the country up there a bit, or p'raps you doesn't? Anyway, let me tell yer there's only two waterholes atween Hilburn and Tarradilla, and that's a good step, too, more especially as it's scrub most o' the way, if you goes by the shortest way, as of course you does go. No 'ne but a Government chap 'd ever 'd 've thought of putt'n a road that ridikless, roundabout fashion. Well, as regards they waterholes, let me tell yer, they don't count more'n one. For this reason. They're quite close 'n one another. They're not two miles apart, one on one side of the ridge and one on t'other. Well, me and Johnson was rid'n that way, as I tell yer, go'n to the waterhole to the left as you comes from Hamilton and Hilburn. The other waterhole's out of the way a bit. That's Long Forster's waterhole. That's where Long Forster killed the thirteen niggers in the cave ten or twelve years ago, or more p'raps; p'raps it was more. Well, we was ridin' quite quiet, me and Johnson, and the horses a bit done up—for, to tell yer the truth, they wasn't up to much, either of 'um—when all at once't we heerd a shot. 'Hello,' says Johnson to me. 'Hello,' he says; 'Why, that sounds like a revolver shot.' I can swear to it that that was what Johnson said to me."

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He paused for a moment to give weight to his thorough appreciation of the solemnity of an oath, even when not sworn to by kissing the Bible and followed up by the verbal tortures of cross-examination.

"When Johnson said that to me," he proceeded, "I answers right up. 'P'raps it is,' I says, 'or p'raps it isn't.' For I've heered sportin' rifles—them little Americ'n rifles—that cracks all the world like a six-shooter. They use 'um for shootin' turkey and kangaroo and wallaby," he explained in a short aside. "Well, we both on us reckoned as that shot must be four or five miles off and kem right off the ridge to us with the wind. Not that there was much of a wind; there wasn't; it was only a bit of a breeze, such as gets up most days towards eleven or half-past, or as late as twelve, if the morning's been quiet. Then Johnson, he says that it must come from close on Long Forster's cave, and then, just as I was agree'n with him, there comes another crack, and that made us pretty cert'n that that was about where it kem from, and that was five miles off if it was a step. Now we was head'n, do you see, to the lef', Tarradilla-way, to the other waterhole, intendin' to camp there and take a spell. But when we both on us makes certain as that must be someone close by Long Forster's Cave, we thinks very likely it's some of the boys on the way to Tarradilla, too, com'n' round from Eaglewood (say) and havin' a shot at some game, turkey, or what not—and p'raps they's camped there a'ready at the waterhole. If we'd seen any smoke gett'n' up we'd have gone there straight right off, but we didn't—for cert'n. I *thort* I saw a bit o' blue agin the tree-tops ahead at the rise of the ridge, but I wasn't cert'n about it, and Johnson couldn't see it at all. And so we kep' consider'n with one another whether we'd turn off that way up to the ridge and Long Forster's Cave, or whether we'd hold right on to the other waterhole."

Perkins seemed struck with the fact that the decision of himself and his friend to go to the cave waterhole instead of

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to the other, with consequences of the most portentous description, had sprung from such trivial and chance causes. He felt that that decision should have had about it something of the manifestly providential, and it seemed to puzzle him not to be able to talk of any presentiment on the part of either of them, or of any warning or sign from without.

"Well," he proceeded, "the horses be'n weak and done up, and go'n up to the cave be'n out of our way a good bit, we'd a'most made up our minds to hold right on to the other waterhole, when Johnson he remembers as how last year, up at Isis Downs, Bob Casey said to him as how he was go'n to shear at Twidle's next year—that's this last season, you understand. Well, it strikes Johnson, you see, that it might be Casey and his mate up there at the cave, and he decides that he'd like fer to go'n see, and, I giv'n way at that and be'n agreeable, we turns a bit and makes for the cave instead of the other waterhole. Well, we jogs along just as usual, and presently we strikes the bottom of the gully and rides on up it straight. For it was more'n a watercourse than a gully, be'n flat and broad and shaller, and most of it the plain rock. We kep on for a mile or so up the course and then we comes round a bend of a suddent, and there's a great wall o' rock in front, and the course com'n right down over it, which must be a big waterfall when there's water in it, and just tremenjous with a flood."

He paused for a moment, feeling his approach to the crisis of his narrative.

"Well, we rides up to the wall and stops there a moment look'n up, and see'n as how we should have to get down and lead the horses fer to mount up onto it, and Johnson hollers out: 'Is there anyone there?' But no'ne says nothing back, only the echo hollers away most curous right up into the ridge, as you might say. And then I says to him, 'Frank,' I says (for that's his cristennen name, and I usually calls him so), 'Frank,' I says, 'you see it's a go after all, and there's no'ne there.' But Johnson, be'n a sorter positive

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chap, as you may say, he answers nuthin, but gets off his horse and leads him up the side of the gully, I foller'n with the other. Well, it was a big tug up the bank, and we'd got to go right on further along it afore we could get into the course again, and then down we comes, and there sure 'nough was the waterhole and the cave, and a fire by the waterhole, all white ash and jess smoulder'n with little blue threads o' smoke. 'We're too late,' says Johnson, stopp'n straight (he and his horse was first—be'n a bit ahead o' me and my horse). And with that they gets clean in the way, and I leads my animal round, and there I sees Johnson stand'n, star'n with all his might at the rock. Then I stares too, and I begins to feel a no end curous feel'n. For, you see, right from the edge of the rock where the waterfall oughter been—right along it up to the ledge of the cave—was smears o' somethin' dark, and the dust all dragged one way. And on one or two places that somethin' dark was red, and we both of us looks up at one another sorter skeert, an' says, unanimous-like in a whisper, 'Blood!'"

He paused. The feelings of that moment had returned on him even more vividly then when he had given his evidence in the court. He raised his eyes to the door in the wall opposite, and several of his audience involuntarily did the same. All the sunlight was gone. The sun had sunk behind the first sombre ridge far up the river, but the second behind it still gleamed for a few moments with wonderful roseate. The after-glow, tender yet weird, seemed to be drawing close. The eddies of the silent treacherous river were unrolling themselves as the blue flood moved unbrokenly downward with the ebbing tide. That scene which had been accomplished between the murderer and his victim, unbeholden of mortal eye, seemed to rise now as a conjured apparition, while through the phantasmagoria of it all, one heard (or thought one heard) the echo of a maddening, fleeting toll and the solemn cadences of the burial service, "dust to dust, ashes to

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ashes." Some signs of movement within the wall communicated themselves to those without. Perkins proceeded a little hurriedly in a suppressed voice as of one who tells a hasty secret which he would fain be done with.

"Well, we ties up the horses," he said, "without a word, and we goes straight up to the ledge and looks into the cave. And there we sees the fut of a man, and presently in the darkness we sees his body all huddled up at the end, and there was a stream of ants going along the rock in the sun up to it. Then Johnson gets up onto the ledge, and bends down, crawl'n into the cave, and catches hold of the boot and begins pull'n, till I can get hold of it too, and we pulls out the body together. At first we couldn't think he was dead, he was that lifelike, and his eyes so clear and natural, look'n at some one fixed, afraid, as if he was go'n to be struck, but far off, you understand, far off somewhere where deadmen look, and the livin' can't see. Then Johnson says all at onc't, 'Why,' he says, 'it's Pilsbury—Pilsbury of Hamilton—Mills' mate!' For Frank (that's Johnson, you understand) knew Hamilton pretty well, and he knew Pilsbury, and Mills, too. He knew Mills at Too'mba when he was there with his uncle Bentley, old Bentley o' the nursery-garden on the Middle Ridge. And I knew that Mills and Pilsbury had taken up a selection Tarradilla-way, and had got put in quod through old Twidle, and both me and Johnson thought as how as they were both in quod at that minit. Well, with that, we takes and examines poor Pilsbury's corpis to see how he kem by his death, and that was pretty clear straight off, for he'd a hole in his left side fit to put three fingers in. Then we considers it a bit all round, as how it happened, and who it was shot him, and why they shot that second time, and got so close to him, (for there was the ackshul scorch of the powder on the cloth of his coat, on one bit where the blood hadn't sopped it)—supposin' they'd missed him the first time, and what we'd best do. And we decides that the best thing to do was fer

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one of us fer to go right on at onc't to Tarradilla to the station, and the other fer to ride back to Hilburn. And that was what we done, after we'd put back the body into the cave and covered it in with stones and bushes to keep off the dingoes. And it was me kem to Hilburn, and there I heerd all about Mills and Pilsbury stick'n the bank up on the Monday night. Well, the whole country got up to go out after the murderer (for we all saw it must be Mills 'ud done it), every man who'd a horse got up, and I was with the party as met Johnson comin' back from Tarradilla with the news from Winton that Mill had cut the telegrapht line to the east of Eaglewood, and had stuck up the Australian Bank there and was gone clean off agin."

He paused once more, and there was a sort of feeling in the little group that the climax was deficient in force. They would like to have had particulars of that amazing chance-discovery and arrest of Mills on board the mail-boat at Rockhampton. But there came a sudden diversion.

A slight movement to the door from within was apparent to the crowding eyes that were fixed upon it. Then it opened and two policemen appeared. At the same moment the sort of shiver of attraction and anticipation that had passed through them all, like a wave of cloud-shadow over a field of corn or wheat, seemed to return and rigidify. The two policemen stepped down on either side of the door with their faces turned back and up. Then Mills appeared in the doorway. That sea of set faces all bent to him caught his glance and held him there motionless for a few seconds like a portrait in its frame. There was a complete pause, a sort of deep inhalation, such as comes in a hurricane before the final outburst. Then, as if by some electric signal flashing through all their hearts, a shrill yell of hatred and execration struck him across the face like a lash. He quailed and fell back with arrested step. His face was ghastly pale, and the strange demi-light of the waning after-glow flushed it a little. But he was very courageous. His splendid resolution

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—the flawless physical reply to the demand of the proud intellect that scorned this mob of brainless fools who exulted over him—made him, after that one moment of human weakness, heroic. He had played, and staked all, and lost! Chance had defeated him, not the tools of these knaves and idiots. A scornful sneering smile flickered on his lips as he stepped on, handcuffed, superb, ignoring them all, down the steps—across the path—and up into the van, the crowd surging and howling round him. Then two of the policemen leaped up behind, and the van was got clear and drove off into the streets and the gathering dusk. And standing there by the rails, screened with a real pity and tenderness by his semi-disabled friend, an old man in slouching white clothes was covering up his face with his arm and sobbing like a child. The Night had come.

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THE HUT BY THE TANKS.

I NEVER knew but one man who thought he had seen a ghost. Of ghost stories at second-hand, third-hand, and so on up to the twentieth-hand, we most of us know plenty. This man I spent six months with. We were on the same station, working together, sleeping in the same room. He was a simple, kindly soul, eminently honest and truthful. I cannot remember him ever telling an apocryphal yarn. This ghost story of his was only produced by accident. One winter night, when we were both in bed and the lights out, the subject of the supernatural came up and I pretty freely expressed my scepticism. A peculiar silence on the part of friend Holmes (Jonnie Holmes was his name, and I had got in the way of calling him Jonnie as often as Holmes) led me to suspect dissent. Of course I began to investigate. Strictly speaking, Jonnie was the first "Australian native" I ever knew. I had been in the bush before and was at home in the life, but I can't think of any other genuine sample of young Australia whom I had been much thrown with before Jonnie. He had been born and bred in the bush, and, except one short and hopelessly bewildering and bewildered visit to Brisbane, had never been out of it. He was one of the numerous offspring of a small selector, and looked forward to one day being a small selector himself. Meantime he and I were boundary riders on a sheep station.

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He had had the normal education of a lad who had luckily lived within reach of a State school and had parents sensible enough to keep him pretty regularly at his "scholarship." (The old English peasant word sounded so curiously to me, I remember, in his Australian mouth.) The besotting and fuddling effects of the appalling solitude of the life of the lonely bushman had so far fallen lightly on him. He had intelligence, and took an interest in all he did, keeping a sort of stock and station journal, which was the record of his advance in all sorts and conditions of knowledge. We all have the element of superstition in us somewhere. It is not for nothing that for countless unknown ages our speechless but reflective ancestors grew into articulation and shuddering dread of the terrible caprices of unknown forces. Jonnie Holmes had a larger share of this superstition than I, that was all. I felt this as I began questioning him. I have had "bush fright" more than once, and know all about it.

"You don't mean to say, Jonnie," I said, "that you believe in ghosts?"

He hesitated a moment, and then got ready to own up.

"Well," he said, "Acheson, I must say I do."

I laughed. It was the wont of Holmes' front hair to stand erect, and this habit neither oil, nor water, nor brush could perceptibly modify. I had a vision of Holmes seeing a ghost when he was a "kid," and that hair taking a lift ever after.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

I explained.

He took the matter seriously, I perceived at once. I lay, still hilarious but only inwardly so, waiting till he enunciated solemnly:

"No, Acheson, I don't think it was seeing the ghost made my wool so terribly uppish. I remember it used to be that way before. But—p'raps it made it worse!"

His solemn tone was altogether too much for me. I began to shout, laughing helplessly. This was a bad move, as, like

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all bushmen, Jonnie was frightfully thin-skinned in the matter of ridicule. It took much persuading to get him to renew the subject, and I had to be very explanatory and serious. At last, however, I succeeded, and the questioning went on.

"What sort of ghosts do you believe in?" I asked. "Apparitions, spectres, lights, rappings, or what?"

"I believe," he replied deliberately, "in two sorts of ghosts. There's the bush ghost, and there's the ghost of murderers and murdered people. I've never seen the bush ghost, not myself; at least, I'm not sure. But I know those who have, and I believe in it."

"What *is* the bush ghost?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "no one seems to know what it *is*. It's a rum sort of thing," he added dubitatively.

Suppressing the almost overwhelming temptation to be flippant and say that it might also be a *whisky* sort of thing, I inquired: "Well, but it must have a shape of some sort. What's it like? Is it the bunyip?"

"The bunship," he said dogmatically, "is bunkum. It's not a fool of a thing like that. It's real. It means great misfortune or death, almost always death. If you see it, you generally die before the year's out. I knew three fellows who died that way, and the other fellow broke his back at a fence and is a living corpse at this hour."

"And what did they say they *saw?*"

"None of 'um were quite certain about it. They all said it was black, and like a ball, and that it rolled along in front to the left of them, and all the while you saw it you kept running cold shivers from behind your ears down your backbone. One of 'um—that was Ned Lane (he died of the fever in Brisbane four years ago)—said he thought it might be the ghost of an animal, and he was pretty sure it had eyes and feet and a tail, but all rolled-round and confused-like. The others thought it was more like a glass globe half full of black liquor that kept whirling about and seemed to be fly-

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ing round the outside of the globe somehow. It kept going and coming. They were all riding at the time, and after a bit the horses got frightened and sweated all over into a lather as if they'd been stuffing themselves on soft food for months."

"*After a bit?* Not at once?"

"No, not at once. They all noticed that. At first none of 'um could make the thing out. It looked quite thin and unsubstantial-like. Ned said he took it for a shadow, and wasn't afraid for a bit, till he knew what it was."

"Was it at night they all saw it?"

"No; Ned saw it about two o'clock. He died a month after—wiped clean out after two days' seedy, and they tell me he was worse than dead before the life was out of him. Morris saw it about the after-glow; Walker on a moonlight night. Walker was riding through the scrub. He died six or seven months after—got scratched by a nail and blood-poisoning did for him. Morris died three or four months after, I was told. A deaf-adder bit him. He was droving horses up North. He put his elbow on it just by the camp fire. He was dead like lightning."

It was evident that Jonnie felt he was merely stating cause and effect.

"And did you think you saw it once yourself?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "I don't think it *could* have been, for it's sixteen months past, and I'm all right. And the horse got frightened first, and, though I saw a round, dark thing rolling ahead of me, to the left, it didn't move, but just kept on there. I couldn't get the horse past anyway. I had to ride right back and round."

"Didn't you go and look at it yourself?"

"No. But you be sure I kept a pretty sharp look out for it as I went along. It was dusk, and I was going into a little place under the Range, Helidon-way, to see a friend of mine who 's an orange orchard there. I was coming down the road over the Range from Toowoomba."

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I could get no further particulars about the bush ghost. Jonnie had given me his whole information and belief on the subject. I returned to the second sort of ghost.

"Then it wasn't the bush ghost," I said, which made your which you saw for certain? Did you ever see any other sort of ghost for certain, Jonnie?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "I did, Acheson."

"What was it like?"

There was a long pause.

"It was like," he said in a low voice, "it was like a man and woman, just the same as living, only they were shadowy a bit, and I think you might have almost looked through them."

"And you—saw—them?"

"I saw them."

"How long ago?"

"Just on two years."

"Will you tell me about it?"

Jonnie seemed to consider. It was evident that he did not relish going through his experience again. Even in the kindly and matter-of-fact daytime I do not think it would have pleased him. How much less, then, at the present hour? It was pitch dark. The wind surged and pressed outside, every now and then booming down the chimney and out through the large, whitewashed, empty fireplace, gently fanning our faces with the breath of the outer darkness. The only sound of life was the mournful stridulation of the curlews in the adjoining swamp. Directly opposite his eyes was the room's one window looking out directly into the black, cloud-thick and wind-swept sky. I realised all this for the first time in this long pause. We had been sitting with the two sons of the boss, chatting pleasantly over the great red ember fire of a more than half consumed log of box, in the cosy little workshop and den they had—still called "the school-room" in memory of educative efforts in the past. The conversational atmosphere of the den had

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been transferred to our bedroom as we undressed by the dim candle light, continuing the conversation, but with the added candour that springs from the absence of some of the original talkers. Now for the first time a something of uneasiness, eeriness—funk, if you like—subtle, indefinable, but unmistakeable, got hold of me. Let me be candid. At such an hour, in such a place, I should not have been altogether put out if this solemn believer in a *bonâ fide* ghost, seen by his own eyes and recognised as "shadowy a bit," and quite uncomfortably transparent, had kept his story for some other occasion. But it was not to be. The demoniac instinct of retailing a horrible experience and thus making somebody participate therein (that well-known personage, the Ancient Mariner, had a finer but less genuine explanation of his grœsome inflictions on the Wedding Guest, who rose the morrow morn a sadder but a wiser man)—this demoniac instinct had got hold of Jonnie, and I felt it. Presently, in a slow, hushed voice, he began.

"It was about two years ago," he said, "a little earlier than this—in June. I've been here just a year. The boss engaged me in Brisbàne. I went down from Toowoomba with Fenwich and a mob of horses, and I never thought I should get to Brisbàne alive, or, any way, get back again. That was after I thought I saw the bush ghost by Helidon. Well, before that, I was on a cattle station fifty or sixty miles off the line, to the north, Hilburn way. The boss himself was alright. He was the son of an old army captain who came here in the convict time. He took no notice of things much, and left it all to the overseer. That overseer, Davis, was just a terror, and no one could stop with him. I put up with him for two years, for he knew a lot about cattle. And, though there's no money in cattle, and hasn't been for years, and isn't likely to be, a man ought to know all about it. Well, at last I got out of him all he knew, and then his ways came unbearable to me, and I made up my mind to go. It may seem a curious thing, but it's a fact.

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I didn't know the land more than twenty or thirty miles round, and especially the other twenty miles or so 'twixt there and the line! I came down from the north-west, and Davis wasn't the man to let you get your nose up off the grindstone and look round a bit if he could help it. The country's all plain about there; some parts with no trees on at all, other parts pretty bushy, and if you don't know it, it's sing'ler how easy you can get lost there. There's always that everlasting circle of trees down on the horizon" (Jonnie always said "horizon" with the *i* short), "and, if you've no landmarks, why, I don't care how good a bushman you are, you can pretty quick get lost."

He paused. He was still talking in that deliberate dreamy way. I suppose a bird, hopping round and round and down and down to a staring snake or a cat, would, if it could talk, talk something in this style about very ordinary matters.

"Well," he said, "I set off to ride Charcoal into Hamilton —that's a bit over sixty miles—and the way seemed as clear as could be. Hamilton's a station on the line, and I was going into Too'mba from it. I set off early in the morning. It was cold and clear, with a slight north-west breeze blowing. You know it's dreadful cold on the plains at night." (This was information to me, who had been boundary riding on them for three or four months! But I don't think Jonnie was altogether aware of my existence just then.) "I don't think they can have it colder anywhere else in the earth. The wind goes right through you and out behind. Nothing 'll stop it. A coat doesn't seem to make any difference. Men have freezed to death out on the plains at nights. What you've got to do is to light a fire and get behind a lorg and make the best of it. Well, towards sunset the wind moved round a bit more west, and presently I began to feel it getting at me. By dark it would be freezing. And, to tell you the truth, I was beginning to feel more and more sure that I'd lost myself. Things got to look bluer and bluer every minit, and, by George, when I made up my mind

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to it that I was clean bushed, I tell you I had a bit of a creep in my back hair, and began thinking of the cosy room at home with Jack Hawthorne and Tom Birkett, and felt like as if I was going back that way presently as a sort of ghost."

He paused again. The wind rose, pressing upon the window panes, rolling into the room from the fire-place that glimmered like a faint, tall, white, threatening figure in the middle of the opposite wall.

"I knew now," he said, "that I was in for a regular night of it in the open, with the wind blowing harder and harder and colder and colder, but I couldn't make up my mind to stop, but kept riding irresolute on. I think Charcoal knew I was bushed long before I did myself, and just made up his mind to go for water, having smelt it this way. Anyhow, just at this moment, passing into a belt of trees, I heard a whirr, and up went nine or ten whistling ducks out of a fine little tank just ahead. I was a bit startled. It came upon me when I was troubled. In an ordinary way, you know, noises in the bush don't startle you. You know what they are. If you get startled by a noise, it's because you don't know what it is, or because you're unprepared or thinking or troubled. I've got startled by a magpie whopping onto my hat as I was riding along under a tree by her nest."

Another pause.

"I recognised in a moment that it wasn't a waterhole. There was work at one side of it—a bit of an embankment. I could tell that by the shape of it, but it was too dark to see any more. Charcoal went right on to the water, while I sat loose in the saddle, looking at it. I was just making out that there was two tanks here leading into one another, with a bit of an island or a promontory in the middle, when he turned a bit to the right, and I looked right up the second tank. That instant I saw a line of straight on it, and the next I gave a bit of an expression of rapture, as you may say, for there was a window, right enough, in a hut or a house of some sort on the top of the far bank. I was that

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glad and impatient that I couldn't scarcely wait to let Charcoal have his fill, but turned him off to the right and, with a dig in the ribs, rode along at a quick trot, with my eyes on the window. I've good sight and can see better than most people, but I tell you I was a bit surprised to make out that hut so well when it was so far off, and the night almost down. The light that came out of the window was astonishingly bright; it lit up all the window, and poured right out. Perhaps that was it. 'Why,' thinks I to myself presently, 'they've got a bit of an illumination on in there to-night. P'raps they've company.'"

He paused. A curlew stridulated close to the window, and then, turning on the wind, must have whirled away down it, for the next moment its cry came faintly from the distance.

"Do you hear?" he said, almost in a whisper. "That's the very curlew p'r'aps that got up and went wheeling round me as the lights went out."

"Lights went out?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Why," he said, "as I was riding on, with my eyes on that window (I counted the panes—there were four of 'um, with a cross-bar down the middle), it went right out black."

"The land on the promontory got between you and it."

"That was what I thought, and I held straight on round the tank, that curlew crying to right and left of me all the time, till I came up to a fence and made out the hut not fifteen yards off, as dark as could be."

"The window was on the other side."

"That fence was a short one and didn't go up to the hut. I reckoned it must be a vegetable garden, closed in to keep out sheep or cattle. As I came up to the door, the curlew following me, something small and white slanted off along the front—a cat, as I thought. But when I drew up, *the door was half open and all as black as pitch!*"

He paused.

"I wasn't altogether frightened, but I'd got a bit of a

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scare and a puzzle, and I sat there staring at the place. There was a rail ran round it to right and left, I found, and p'raps there was once a gate in front of the door. I drew back Charcoal a bit, and we went round the hut, the curlew with us. It was fairly big—two rooms as I reckoned—and a bit of an outhouse. On the one side was a window, the side to the left of the door. I caught the glaze of the glass. Just then I saw the white thing again on the ground and called to it several times, 'Puss, puss, puss.' Then it mewed back, and a wild, half-starved sort of mew it was. I sat and considered. You know, I've seen mirage dozens of times, and once a mirage that looked just like two trenches half full of water took me in. P'raps, I thought, that window was a bit of a *night* mirage, so to speak. For I never had the least idea that anyone was inside the hut. I reckoned it was deserted. I can't tell you why."

He paused again.

"Well," he said, "the long and the short of it was that I jumped down, tied up Charcoal to the rail, got ready to hit at anything, went in through the door, and brought a vesta round the back of my moleskins and up into the air in a moment. I had my fingers round it, and the wind was on the opposite wall, and the match burned up. I looked about. It was just an ordinary slab hut. There was a big empty fireplace at the right end. A little door at the left end, half open, led into another room. The fireplace had a few half-burned lorgs in it, blurred with rain. The floor was beaten earth. There wasn't a sign of furniture, or anything except a shut-down—a table-slab—up against the wall under the little window by the door. All the glass was broken out of the window, and a few bits were on the ground. I lit another vesta and went into the second room. There I got a surprise. It was quite small, scarcely big enough to turn in, but there was a stretcher in it—a frame with sacking sewn across it, and above the head of it were some shelves. The four window-panes were all unbroken. As I was look-

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ing again at the sacking, I got a bit of a scare. At the end of it, just to the right, was a great black stain. I tell you I had to look on the ground underneath to see if there was anything there, and all the while I was afraid somebody was going to come at me from behind. I tell you, when the vesta burned my fingers, and I dropped it with a start onto the earth, I got up and began staring round me, trickling with sweat all over."

"Well?" I said.

"Well," he said, "there was nothing. I went out there, leaving it flaring and waving in the draught on the earth, and set off round to the out-house. What I wanted was wood. I intended camping there for the night. I wasn't going to freeze out in the open for the sake of that stretcher, and a deserted hut. 'What's a deserted hut?' thinks I. 'There's piles of 'um all over Queensland, and there's dozens of reasons why they're given up.' I got into the out-house, and set a vesta burning. If I couldn't find wood there, I would pull down the fences round the house; but in one corner I lit on quite a little pile. It was piercing cold all this time, but I scarcely noticed it, I was that taken up with my thoughts. Just as I was coming to the out-house door, with my arms full of wood, I saw the cat on the top of some timber by the wall, and called to her again. This time she seemed to take more heed, and followed along behind, mewing all the way, and entered the hut after me. I threw down the wood on the floor, and after a little trouble got a flame going. All the while I was doing this, I can't tell you why, but I thought someone was looking at me round the corner of the door by the stretcher. Once or twice I turned my head and stared, but there was no one. Then I got up and went and closed it, and it was a great relief."

Jonnie paused and emitted a slight but protracted sigh.

"I went back into the shed," he continued, "several times, and brought in enough wood and lorgs—(there was a

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pile of regular cut lorgs, just the size of across the fire-place in there)—enough to keep a blazing fire all night. The cat followed me to and fro, mewing all the time, and I tried to get her to come to me, but she wouldn't. When I got into the house, she'd stand at the door, arching her back and mewing, but she wouldn't come in any further, and the moment I got to the door to go out, she cleared off ahead of me. But I had a good look at her. She was a most curious cat. She was a sort of glazy white, quite *shaggy*, you might say, with the biggest blazing eyes I ever saw on any beast in my life. She was very thin and bony, though she'd a regular pot-belly. I suppose she was a tame cat that had gone on the wild. Their bellies get pot like that. You see, one day they gorge and then maybe for a week they starve. It's either a feast or a famine with them, as they say."

He paused.

"I felt awful queer. I never felt quite like that ever before or since. I couldn't make up my mind to let Charcoal loose: no, nor even to hobble him, though I knew the poor brute wanted a feed and there was grand grass about. To tell you the truth, I'd been glad to have had him in the hut with me. There was something in that next room I wouldn't have looked at for worlds. I knew it. I knew that, if I saw it, I'd never forget it, and I didn't want to see it. Once or twice I felt like going into the outhouse and lighting a fire outside, but the door faced west, and there was no show. I might wake up frozen, or fizzling in the blazing shed. I put on my great coat again (I'd pulled it off when I began to make the fire), and took the horse-cloth from under Charcoal's saddle. I wanted it to squat on. But I did up the girths again. I couldn't make up my mind to unsaddle him. I tied him by the bridle, so that he could get at some grass by the rails, and went over on chance to the garden fence and broke in. There I found lots of green stuff, carrots, lettuces, potatoes, all running wild and seeding, and brought him back a feed. And all the while that cat keep skirting

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round me, and followed me into the garden; and, just as I got to the door, hang me, if that curlew didn't come bansheeing up about me again. I said to myself: 'Now either that cat's going to come in for the night or stop out for the night.' So I went in and sat down on the horse-cloth to the left of the fire, and the cat crept into the doorway. But it was just no good. For she wouldn't come in further, and edged off when I got up. At that I just shut the door to, and shoved in the rusty bolt, and sat down again."

A pause.

"Well, I was cold and tired, and I began bit by bit to feel that that thing in the next room was going to keep quiet——"

"What thing?" I asked.

"That horrible thing I didn't want to see. How should *I* know what it was? Why, I didn't *want* to know! Well, I sat and sat, and I suppose I was just dozing off when I heard a dreadful scramble and a crying, and jumped up onto my feet and pretty well out of my skin at the same time. It was at the window. It was the cat. She must have clambered upon the rails outside and jumped at the window. She was struggling to get through one of the squares where a pane had been, but her pot belly stopped her. I can't say why, but I just began to laugh like mad. I kept on laughing and laughing and laughing, till she dragged herself through and fell clumsily down onto the floor. And that set me off laughing again, and the curious thing is, that she got up and came straight to me, and arched her back against my legging. I stroked her, and sat down on the horse-cloth, still laughing (it was quite foolish), and she arching her back and staring up in my eyes in the most strange, wild, eager way I ever saw in an animal."

A pause again.

"Well," he said, "this went on for some time, till I began to feel a bit confident-like, and left off stroking her, and she cuddled up against me, and I went right off to sleep. When I woke"

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A longer pause.

"Yes," I said, "when you woke?"

"I didn't wake. Some one woke me. Some one laughing. I just opened my eyes and looked right at the door. It was open. I knew it was open. It was open wide enough to see the bottom of the stretcher. I saw the bottom of the stretcher."

He could not get on.

"Well?" I said.

"There was a sheet on it—a sheet and two feet. Naked. Fat and small. The toes crinkled. With earth on them. There was a bright light. And some one was laughing—laughing like mad."

Once more he could not get on.

"Well?" I said; and again, "Well?"

"I got up. I had to get up. I went over to the other wall. By the window. I stood. I looked in. I knew it all at once. There were candles in bottles on the shelves. Three of 'um. There was a candle in a candlestick on the chair at the foot of the bed. She was lying stretched out on the bed, her arms by her side. She was almost naked, dirty, smeared with earth. There was earth in her eyes, on her lips, in her hair. Her eyes were hollows and her teeth were snarling. You could see 'um all. The cat was standing on her chest. It was arched up, staring into her eyes. Its tail was right stiff out, with a bend at the top—ridiculous. It almost made me laugh. He'd dug her up. I knew it. Right on her breast was a great black mark—black, thick, clotted. That's where he stabbed her as she lay asleep, and there he was kneeling beside her, holding her hand and laughing like mad. Then he howled like a wild beast—like a starving dingo does when it's alone in the dark night in the scrub. Then he cried and sobbed, and then he laughed like mad, and I began to laugh too. He said she'd deserved it. He said he'd do it again. Then he called her: 'Maggy, Maggy, Maggy, Maggy, Maggy,

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Maggy!' And then he took to laughing again. Then, all at once, like a flash, the lights went out. It was gone. I knew it was gone. I put my hand up to my head and wiped off the sweat. The fire had burned low. I threw on some wood, and it blazed up. I could see into the room. It was all dark. I made up my mind I'd go and shut the door. It was close on morn. I got to the door and was closing it when something stopped it. I cried out. I couldn't have stood any more. I should have gone mad. I looked down. It was the cat, lying on the floor. I pulled the door to, and the cat with it. I took her up, and went with her to the fire. She was limp and warm, but dead."

"*Dead?*"

"Quite dead."

"I sat with her on my knees till the dawn came out pale and then ruddy and then yellow on the wall opposite the window over my head. Then I took her up and the horse-cloth and went out. The wind was on the lull. All round was a lovely wooded country, beautifully grassed, and the first sunlight glinting on the waterpools right out across the plain. A little shepherd's-companion was frisking about Charcoal's head, teasing him. I took and buried the cat and rode away. That's all."

"And you never heard anything more about . . . You never asked about the hut and who lived there?"

"No. But I can tell you exactly where it is if you like, for I struck the line about ten miles further on and came straight into Hamilton."

I lay silent for a bit.

"Do you hear that curlew outside?" he asked. "P'raps it's the very curlew. There's no knowing."

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A BUSH GIRL.

I.

He was just an average young Englishman on his travels. He had lived for all the twenty-five years of his life in a cathedral town in the south of England, and he had a sort of conviction that, just as Axminster Cathedral was the finest in England (or anywhere else), so Axminster in its way was a unique sort of town. His father was a well-to-do solicitor. There had been a Reid a solicitor, and another a doctor, any time these hundred years in Axminster. The Reids thought that it would be the same in another hundred years, or a hundred after them, and a good many other of the town folk thought the same. Jack Reid, his father's younger brother, was the first of the family who ever (in the family's opinion) did anything extraordinary. He emigrated to Australia. None of them quite knew why he did it. He was the younger of the two Reid sons of the day (that was thirty years ago), and he went up to London to study as a medical student. He was rather delicate and his health broke down. He started a chronic cough and phlegm-spitting. It was the fixed Reid idea that a man ought to have a profession and work at it, but the family agreed that in Jack's case this would be a mistake, at any rate for the present. A trip to the south of France was proposed. Jack—he is known

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among the contemporary Reids as Uncle Jack—suddenly startled them all by announcing his intention of going out to Australia "for good." He went, and ultimately settled on the Queensland Downs as a squatter, where he married and begat three children. These were "our aunt and cousins in Australia, you know," with whom one of those droll, monthly-mail "family correspondences," which are the peculiarity of English middle-class people, was kept up for years and years. The second son of the elder Reid brother was named after the younger brother in Australia. He took after him in a quite singular way. There were only the two, and the younger was the mother's favourite. He was quiet, but by no means dull, and a little inclined to be delicate. When his mother died, to whom he was much attached, it was found that she had left him the bulk of her private fortune, amounting to an annuity of something like £400 a year. Then Jack the second did the second extraordinary thing in the recorded annals of the family. He announced his intention of throwing up his profession and travelling for several years. He was to have become a solicitor. He had his way, of course; he always had; and in a few months he was in New York. He spent over a year in travelling about the States, and then found himself in 'Frisco. Nothing had surprised or impressed him much in the States. Size and figures had had no spell for him. He still thought Axminster, its town and its people, was on the whole the great criterion of mundane perfection. He did not like the Americans. The restlessness of this land, where everyone is bent on one thing, and one thing alone—grabbing—perplexed and shocked him. But his perplexity and proclivity for being shocked reached their acme in the American women. He could not get out of his head the idea that they were boys in petticoats. He looked upon marriage as his own inevitable future, but the thought of marrying an American girl positively made him shudder. He was not sensual, or even very sensuous, but the prevailing type of American girl, the lean,

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shrill-voiced feminine cynics, who contrasted, in his eyes, so frightfully with the well-fed, rose-and-pink, demure, platitudinal maidens of Axminster, inspired him with loathing and almost hatred. He determined that he had seen enough of America, and it was then that the idea of passing on to Australia occurred to him. A line of steamers runs direct from 'Frisco to Sydney. Why not take his ticket and go? Australia is still English, and if he saw his cousins (as, of course, he would; Queensland is quite close to Sydney and Melbourne, the two capitals—a few hours off by rail, like London or Manchester)—well, his cousins would not be lean, shrill-voiced feminine cynics, at any rate.

II.

When he got to Sydney and had set up at an expensive and detestable hotel, he wrote to his uncle in Queensland and told him of his arrival. Then he set to taking stock of "their harbour," their town, and their people. He thought them rather grasping and imbued with the notion that he was fair prey (in this respect they were quite as bad as the Americans); but they were "more English," and he began to make some friends. At this point he received a black-edged letter from his unknown aunt, telling him of her husband's sudden death from heart disease about six months ago, but expressing a cordial wish on her part and that of her son and daughters (there were two) to see him as their guest for just as long as he cared to be so. Jack answered suitably in the affirmative, and betook himself to his pleasant life with the ever-growing circle of his friends. He rather liked the Sydney girls. Perhaps they shone by contrast with the

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Americans; but he admitted to himself that (and this was his one great criterion of judgment) he had not seen one he would ask to be his wife. Jack loved the open air and more or less active life in the open air, and there was something lazy and languishing about these ample, pale-faced girls with their second-rate "English society" airs that ended in wearying him. See him, then, one afternoon waving farewell from the steamboat at the Circular Quay to quite a little crowd of friends, male and female, and leaving springtime Sydney with its trying heats and colds for the more genial clime of Queensland. From Brisbane he wrote again to his aunt on the Downs, and set about examining the new city and its people. It was over a week before he received a reply, and was a little astonished to learn that the cause of this delay was that they only got their mail once a week at Taralla (the station). He was not the sort of man who cared about what is commonly called "roughing it." His preference was for paths that were beaten. It was, then, with a certain mild misgiving that at an unearthly hour one morning he got into the Toowoomba train and began the journey to this Ultima Thule where they got their letters only once a week. The journey was a tedious one. He was so cross with the dust and discomfort (a red-bearded, creaking-voiced selector with a wife and seven small children, who invaded the compartment at Ipswich, and ate and made a noise right on to Helidon, were the prime cause of the latter), that even the Toowoomba ascent with its magnificent panorama of a sea of tree-tops, shivering in the wind and purple with waves and splashes of cloud-shade, scarcely mollified him. He thought the train was pulled by a toy engine and crawled instead of running. He thought the stopping and hanging about at every wretched platform or so-called station detestable. He thought the management worse than non-existent, and, when he got out at one of the wretchedest of these wretched platforms in the gathering dusk and found no one on it but the station-master and a clerk, who knew nothing

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whatever about the movements or intentions of the Taralla people, Jack fairly bubbled over and swore, which was not at all a usual thing with him. While he was standing there, however, in the cold wind and settling night, disconsolate and savage, he heard the sound of approaching wheels, and presently a buggy with a pair of horses loomed out on the road that led to the station, and Jack felt the situation was saved. The buggy stopped, and a slight young man in a slouch hat and with a slouching gait came up to him.

"I'm young Reid," he said, awkwardly. "I suppose you're Mr. Reid, my cousin."

With a good deal of trouble they hoisted up Jack's two portmanteaux and his bundle of rugs into the buggy. "Young Reid" lit the buggy lamps and they set off on their dreary fifteen miles' drive over the dark, bleak plains. Jack was not a talker, and his namesake (in christian as well as surname), was an utterly taciturn youth with his mind wrapped up in sheep, horses and local lawn-tennis. They talked little, and seven or eight times Jack had to get down and open the paddock gates, for Jinnie and Florrie, the two horses, were, as his cousin said, "a bit flash," and wanted holding in. At last the station lights shone out through the trees, and they entered the home-paddock by a rough drive leading up to the house. Their advent was hailed by an infernal chorus of dogs from the kennels fifty or sixty yards off. When they arrived at the garden gate with its white railings stretching away dimly to left and right, a young girl ran out from the house, down the veranda steps, and opened the gate wide. Jack got down and came to her. They shook hands.

"We're *tho* glad you've come!" she said, in a merry, lisping, childish tone. "Mother wath getting quite fidgety. I'm Amy. Come in. Jack'll thee to the bocktheth."

She led the way up through the garden, he following her. At the open door Mrs. Reid and her elder daughter met and welcomed him. They took him into the dining-room, a

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long narrow apartment of varnished pine with a large fireplace and a large red log blazing in it. The dinner table was comfortably set. They were all a little constrained, and when "young Reid" came in, and presently, at his mother's suggestion, took him to his room on the other side of the passage lower down, Jack had but a confused impression of them all, but it was not altogether a pleasant one. He thought them all very thin and unsubstantial, and the girls' voices were rather shrieky. He felt confident of one thing. He would never want to marry a "bush girl," if "bush girls" were all like Alice. Thus he thought as he washed his hands before rejoining them, and thus he thought, only very much more so, as he undressed and got into bed that night.

III.

THEY were all very anxious to make things pleasant for him, especially the girls. Reid was uncouth, but showed him many small attentions in the way of lending him the best gun (the sole double-barrelled breech-loader they had; it had been the father's), the best horse, the best chances of getting a shot at the ducks or other game in the swamps or at the waterholes. The girls chattered incessantly, interrupting their mother and one another in a most unladylike way, Jack thought, but they were more deferential to him, at least at first. He retailed to them incidents of the superior social life at home, but they were not as impressed as they ought to have been. They seemed to think a good deal of it only "very odd," and once when he described Alicia Symonds, the ideal young lady of Axminster, Alice commented with one of her curious harsh changes of voice—her brother and Amy called them "cracks" or "creaks"

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indifferently—to the effect that how "quaint" she (Alicia) must be! The next morning Jack, taking an after-breakfast stroll with his cigarette out to the kennels, was almost run over by Amy, astraddle on bare-backed Jinnie, furiously driving the horses into the stable stockyard, her brother and sister and Joe, the knockabout boy, assisting. Amy was still in short dresses, it is true, but in England girls of twelve or thirteen do not ride astraddle on bare-backed horses, whooping like wild Indians. Jack spoke about it to Mrs. Reid, but she seemed to think it nothing extraordinary; it was only "Amy's way; she'd get quieter when she went into long dresses in a year or two." This did not satisfy Jack, so he took the opportunity to speak to Amy herself about it. He told her he thought she should conduct herself with more dignity. Amy did not seem to understand. He alluded to the morning's equestrian performance. Amy averred that she could *thee* no harm in *that!* "Why, Elthie Nowell rode Frisk *athraddle* when the wath here lath year, and Elthie wath a girl of nineteen, there! And no one thought there wath any harm in it either! There!"

"I don't know who Miss Nowell may be," said Jack, "but she can't be a nice girl for you to know, or for any girl to know, if she does things like that!"

Amy went at him in a moment, pounding at him with her fists and exclaiming passionately—

"O, you horrid man! You horrid man! to thay thuch a thing about Elthie!"

Jack got out of her way after he had received a punch or two in the ribs, and Amy suddenly burst into tears and covered her face up. Then he approached, and, in a gentle but superior manner, attempted to comfort her. The child's vehemence scared him a little. He felt that perhaps he had judged rather harshly, and had better make his peace, and at last after some trouble he succeeded.

"But you muth never thay a word againth Elthie," said Amy, "nevah, nevah! I can't bear it. Neither could

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Alith. You know we think there'th no one in the world like Elthie. The'th the beauthifuleth and *nobleth* girl in the whole world."

Jack acquiesced, and asked for further particulars.

"Thall I tell you about her?" asked Amy suddenly clearing up. (They were sitting on a felled tree now, a little way from the wash-house, passing round which he had met her.)

"I should like to hear," said Jack with polite resignation, "very much."

"Well," said Amy, "the wath an only child, and now the'th an orphan. Ithn't that thad? I think ith thad. Her father wath very rich, but he *thpecalated* and got broke by the drought. He went bung. They hadn't anything. And then—and then he killed himthelf. Wathn't it wicked? He blew out hith brainth. And then Mithith Nowell took bad, and died. Her heart broke" (Amy heaved a deep sigh). "Well, every one wanted to have Elthie; we'd 've all been *tho* glad to have her. The'th tho good and noble and beauthiful. The'th like an angel, and no one can ride like her in the whole world. But the'th tho proud, you can't think. The wouldn't go—the wouldn't go to any one!" (Amy lowered her voice.) "The went ath a thervant and earned wageth. The went down to Brithbane, and then to Thydney. The wath houthmaid and they worked her to death."

"Why didn't she go as a governess?" asked Jack.

"Well, I'm thure I don't know," said Amy reflectively, "unleth it wath that the didn't know French and couldn't play. But wath that? Anyone would have been only too glad to get Elthie any way."

"And weren't these people who took her as housemaid only too glad?"

"No," said Amy promptly, "they were *beath!*"

Jack ventured on no opinion.

"Now, Mr. Reid," said Amy with sudden confidentiality, "I'll tell you a thecret. No one knowth but mother, and

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Alith, and me. We're keeping it ath a thurprith from Jack, becauth Jack'th gone on her, you know; he'th thpoony on her. All the men are."

Jack groaned silently to himself.

"I thought she was in Sydney," he said.

"No," said Amy, "the'th in Brithbane. The took the fever down in Thydney; they worked her tho, and we've written—and written—and written, and the'th coming up here to take a thpell and get throng again, and we're never going to let her go away any more. And the'll be up here neckth week, and we're not goin' to thay a word to Jack till Wednethday morning, when Alith ith going to thay at breakfath quite quiet: 'Jack, would you mind taking in the buggy to meet the up train thith afternoon. Elthie'th coming!' Ithn't it *gloriouth?* Now you muth promith not to tell! You promith?"

Jack promised.

IV.

THE redoubtable Miss Nowell turned out better than he had expected. She did not talk as much as the other women-folk, but her manners were terribly free-and-easy, and she had a way of expressing herself decisively on certain topics and looking straight in your face all the time, that distinctly reminded Jack of those dreadful American girls. She was not as vulgar and familiar as they were, but she was far too independent and argumentative. Then she discussed matters before Alice, and even Amy, which Jack considered made highly improper material for the conversation of girls. Once or twice her quiet phrases actually made him blush. It was not that he had been immaculate; few young men nowadays, or any days, are or were. But he distinguished between

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one's talk to a lady and one's talk to those who, in his pet phrase, had forfeited all right to be considered such. Nonetheless these very topics and their discussion with Miss Nowell and Alice strangely fascinated him. He was a fairly pure-minded and honourable man, and it would take much to make him break a law of his little code of social morality, such as it was. This girl at once attracted and repelled him in a way no girl ever had before. They could never talk without angering one another. He knew quite well that if he stated any of his social beliefs, whatever they might be, she would never let them pass unchallenged. He was quite the reverse of quarrelsome. His ideas on the whole duty of man (and woman) were, he thought, irrevocably fixed. He had heard them impugned again and again, and scarcely deigned to reply. Acute, sensitive Americans (and particularly American girls) could not keep their fingers off him. They saw he thought himself their serene superior as a social product, and they attacked him viciously. It only amused him. He "never argued with women." He held that an arguing woman was like a woman running. It was a deplorable spectacle, from which we should charitably avert our ears or eyes. His own persistent perversity in ceaselessly challenging this half-educated, coarse-fingered bush girl, and then proceeding to fight with her about social ideas which were, to his mind, as fixed as the Ten Commandments, annoyed and humiliated him. He acknowledged her good qualities. She was honest, kind-hearted, pure even. He acknowledged her untutored grace. Her beauty and perfect healthfulness grew under his very eyes in her marvellous recovery from the pallid languour of her illness. Her hands, it is true, were a continual jar to him. He likened them to a milk-maid's, but, when he came upon her one sunset milking the cow, the very froth ruddy with the pink and tender glow, he had to admit that the milk-maid's pose became her. And, when she heard his footstep and leant back her head to look at him, and the sunset streamed right

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onto it, his heart gave a jump and stood most stupidly still, and he hadn't a word to say. That face of hers as she leaned back—her brown hair loose round her white brow—her clear eager eyes—her long pink lips half open with the large white teeth showing through—haunted him in his solitary walk before he came in to dress and wash for dinner—haunted him as he stood there in the dim candle-lit gleaming room—haunted him as he blew out the candle and went on past the dining-room into the drawing-room—haunted him as he sat there alone staring into the fire, and only disappeared when Alice and Amy came in, laughing and chattering, and presently the bell went for dinner. He profoundly disapproved of her. He had so far looked upon her more as a sort of thing than as a person—a sort of evil social tendency, which wanted fighting and subduing. Now she took sudden shape as the incarnation of that tendency, and he shivered to think that her face was sweet. Once every week she or Alice rode out with Reid and him for a gallop after the kangaroos with the dogs. The sport was not equal to fox-hunting at home, of course, but it was really good sometimes. The girls had only one habit and side-saddle, and so only one of them could go at a time. Both of them rode in detestably bad style, he thought, just as Reid did, but there was no denying their courage and powers of sticking on. The party used to start off immediately after breakfast in the early morning (Saturday morning) when Reid had some leisure. Reid was his own boundary-rider with Ellison, the boundary-rider who stopped with Joe in the hut. Then they would set off with two or three of the dogs, and ride till they put up a kangaroo. Sometimes they would have a grand chase and be in at the death. Other times the fences would spoil the fun by making them ride round to a gate. At the last, they would canter back quickly together and get in for lunch.

On one of these occasions when Elsie Nowell was with them, the party got split up, the three dogs all making off

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after separate animals. Jack saw her riding off with Reid, who was bending forward to her, as she to him, in a rather marked anner, and, for the first time in the three months since she had been there, had a violent twinge of jealousy. He was too proud to turn back, and held on at full split. Singularly enough, the idea of being jealous of her with his cousin had never occurred to him. They seemed to his apprehension so simply and frankly mere friends. He had quite forgotten Amy's words on the subject, but they came back to him now with some force, and troubled him to the point of violent anger. Riding on, disturbed and heedless, he was suddenly pulled right off his horse by a bough and narrowly escaped a bad fall. When a quarter of an hour later he succeeded in catching his horse again and realised that he had no notion where he was, his bad temper was at its worst. At this point he suddenly broke out from a clump of scrub and beheld the girl riding alone with two of the dogs, at right angles to him, and not a hundred yards off. He came up to her, taking his hat off, and entered upon explanations. He felt in the humour for a quarrel. He despised himself for it, but that only made him the angrier. They rode on together—she flushed, lovely, merry; he morose, catching up all she said, almost viciously aggressive. She saw a little how things were, and would have let him alone, but he would not permit this. He took a high moral tone and began to lecture her. He accused her of harming Alice's mind and Amy's. She grew pale, astonished, but made no reply. She almost thought he was drunk. Her silence maddened him. After a short pause, he burst out:

"I think it is really not right, Miss Nowell, that you should be here. You have degraded yourself by your associates. You mayn't think so. I daresay you believe it is not so. But I know better. A girl who lives and *sleeps*—I beg your pardon, but you said so yourself—who *sleeps* with servants, is bound to be contaminated by them and their ways."

They were riding under the great boughs of a fine grove

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of gum-trees. It was close to a creek-bed, and the sound of the windy leaves mingled with the chirping of small birds and the gurgling notes of a magpie overhead. He was riding to her left, not a yard off. The dogs jogged on negligently behind. She sat there in the shabby brown riding-habit, that did service for the two girls, now paling, now flushing. A light leather whip was in her hand. A small bunch of white chrysanthemums was at her breast. She was looking at him, and he looked back at her as he said:

"I am sorry to seem rude or hard, but I cannot conscientiously stand by and see my own cousins harmed. My aunt does not understand these things. She is too simple. I shall speak to her, and tell her that I do not think you are a fit person——"

The next moment he was aware of two facts. The first was that someone had called at him, with fierce loathing and scorn, the single word "Beast!" The second was that he was struck full across the face by the violent blow of a whip.

He did not wince. In less than five seconds he had recognised what he had done. He knew he had sinned, and he took his punishment like a man.

They walked their horses on in a terrible silence to the gate of the home-paddock, which he opened for her to pass through, and shut behind her; and then once more—she gazing steadfastly in front of her, erect, proud, ghastly white, yet lovely; he, pale save for the red weal across his cheeks and upper lip, utterly humiliated and cast down—they went on side by side up to the stable. There she jumped down, and he too. He offered to take her horse, but, seeing Joe in the buggy-shed close by, she walked straight up to him, and gave him the reins without a word. Jack stood and watched her going along, with her large, free strides, so proudly to the white garden-gate, and up into the house, and the sob rose in his throat. At that moment he would have given his soul for her.

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V.

So far as he could make out, she never spoke a word of what had happened to anyone. She was no different to himself, unless perhaps a little colder, and she took care to see him as seldom as possible. But Jack could not let the incident pass in this way. One evening, meeting her at the garden gate, he took off his hat as usual, and asked her deferentially if she would speak with him for a moment? She bent her head, and they stepped across the beaten earth of the lawn-tennis court into the paddock grass. There he made his apology, and there she at once accepted it.

"All I ask," she said, "is that you never make any allusion to it again. Let us forget it."

At this point Amy came running up to them, and they did not speak together alone again. Day followed day, week week, and month month. The old discussions and disputes were renewed, but more mildly on both sides. Jack's ideas were as unchanged as ever, it seemed, on the subject of woman's duty in life, and especially a gentlewoman's duty; the two could evidently never agree, but they no longer quarrelled about it. Jack was feeling more at ease. He had resigned himself to the simple pleasure of the situation. He had blotted out and forgotten that hateful incident in the past. He would not look ahead. He was content to let things slide on smoothly to the fall. What that fall would be he knew in his heart of hearts quite well, but he would not formulate the thing to himself. He felt she liked him. He knew she must realise that he was not as other men, but really better every way—and how much better than the sort of men she had met here or was ever likely to meet! He acknowledged all that was fine in her freely enough now. He waited for the hour when he should have to decide about their future, and waited with perfect resignation. That

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hour came rather suddenly. One morning after breakfast he found Amy in the grass by the kennels crying. They were "friendth" now, as Amy said, and he set about comforting her quite simply. Then he learned her trouble. Elsie was going away—*would* go away; nothing would stop her. She was going away to Sydney again as a housemaid to a *beath* of a woman. Amy *knew* she was a beath! He rose, a little pale and hushed, and went away alone. No one spoke a word on the subject. But after lunch, which was very quiet and suppressed, seeing Miss Nowell go into the drawing-room alone from the veranda, he passed quickly through the dining-room and up the passage to the drawing-room door, which he opened and entered.

"Miss Nowell," he said, "Miss Nowell."

She had risen already, and was going out at the window onto the veranda again. She evidently wished to avoid him. On hearing his voice, however, she turned and looked at him straight. Her fixed gaze disconcerted him a little. He bent his eyes down, but advanced a step and put his hand onto the back of a chair.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I wanted to say something to you."

She did not move.

"I have just heard," he went on, "that you are going away to-morrow. I wanted to say something to you."

Still not a movement or a word.

"It's a little sudden," he said; "I—I was not quite prepared for it. You are going to Sydney, Amy says."

"Not to Sydney again," she said simply, "To Yarong. That's a little way out. I've got a place there—as housemaid. I think it's a very good place from what I know of it. They have written for me." She spoke with indifference, trying to put him at his ease.

He looked up at her.

"Miss Nowell—Elsie!" he said. "*Do* let me call you Elsie! That's how I always think of you—I can't bear the

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idea of you going back again to work—as a servant. I want you . . . I want to tell you . . . Why," he said, recovering himself with an effort, "what I want to tell you is this. I want to ask you if you will marry me?—if you will be my wife?"

She stared at him, astonished.

"I know," he went on, "that it's unexpected. I didn't make up my mind till this morning—till I heard you were going. You thought I was too proud, I suppose—that I would never ask you to marry me? You knew I disapproved of your way of looking at things, and the things you do——"

"I never thought of it at all," she said.

"Well," he proceeded, fairly started, "I went this morning, after breakfast, when I heard of it from Amy, I went out into the field—the paddock—down by the cowshed and the tank, and thought it all over. I know you're not the sort of girl that I imagined for my wife. At home—in Axminster, they'll think I've make a strange choice, but—Miss Nowell—Elsie—I know now what is good in you, and I love you, and I will always stand by you. Perhaps, too, you will change when you see how different things are at home."

She laughed outright.

"What are you talking about?" she said. "Do you think I would marry you, Mr. Reid?"

He looked at her with incredulous surprise. She made a movement forward. Her eyes were flashing.

"Mr. Reid," she said, "you don't understand, or you'd make me quite wild. You insulted me once, and I struck you. Do you know you've just insulted me again? Your wife? Marry you? Go home with you to your wretched, slavish England? Why, I tell you I'd *scorn* to be your wife! I'd die, rather! It makes me sick to *think* of it! What do you take us for, us ko-lon-ial girls?" (The phrase sarcastically drawled out.) "Do you think we want to be used like you use your girls in England? Thank you! If

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we're to be your slaves and wait upon you, and put up with you, and be grateful to you for whatever you'll be good enough to give us, and all that, why, we'd better go right off to Turkey and be harem girls. Do you think I don't know all about it? I've met men like you before. I know them well. And I've read about them, too." She choked a little and paused.

"There," she said, "you've got me wild again, and it's no good, I know."

She held out her hand.

"There," she said, "let's shake hands. I don't bear you any ill-will. You can't help it. You were brought up like that. You don't know any better; you don't understand; that's all."

He stood motionless, incredulous, staring at her, but mechanically took her hand and let it fall. She went back to the window, but paused before passing out.

"That is good-bye," she said. "Don't try and see me again. I can't bear it." She shuddered. She was thinking of being married to him.

Then she was gone, and he still stood there, motionless, incredulous, staring stupidly.

* * * * *

The following is an extract from a letter that arrived at Axminster six or seven weeks later. It was to Reid the elder:—"I have made up my mind," it ran, "to return very shortly. I shall come by the Orient and not go viâ the Cape, as I intended. I will let you know the name of the ship in my next. I am tired of travelling, and am getting home-sick for a sight of dear old Axminster and you all. I confess this travelling has not been much of a success, take it as a whole, but it is good for a man to travel. It teaches him new ideas, and then he can compare what he sees elsewhere with what he knows at home, and can see how much better things are there, *on the whole*, than anywhere else. I shall be rather sorry to leave Australia. Aunt and my cousins

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have all been very kind and pleasant, and I have made several good friends here and there. Give my love to Lizzie and the children, and remember me kindly to Mrs. Symonds and Alicia Symonds, who, I hope, are both quite well"

Cetera desunt.

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FLOWERS FOR THE DEAD.

I HAD a most singular adventure last month. It came about in this way. I was stopping at Rosehill, one of the biggest stations on the Queensland Downs, with my friend Davis, the manager. Hamilton, the nearest township, is about thirty-five miles off, and, having business there, I got the loan of a horse from him, intending to ride over. I had never gone before, but the road seemed very simple. Rosehill is a cattle station in the middle of sandy but well-timbered country. It is quite wild; very little of it being fenced off, the cattle of one station constantly straying on to the others, which gives considerable trouble at stock-taking time. Eight miles to the south you strike on the line of mail-coaches. This was the point I missed. In the forest lands, rich with green boughs, there was a diversity of tracks, and I somehow managed to light on the wrong one. Without getting absolutely bushed, I found myself compelled to stake my chance on a direct cut through the scrub in the direction of the telegraph line. The sun was setting as I struck it. All chance of losing myself was now over. The telegraph runs down the middle of the long, straight "lanes" for miles and miles right into Hamilton. Furthermore, the whole character of the country suddenly changes. A great, grey, treeless plain, infinitely monotonous and dreary, replaces the scrub, just as black soil replaces the sand.

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As I came out from the trees, a band of misty powdered pink and gold all along the western horizon sky on my right —with the sun at the base of a great dense, pallid cloud— told me I should not be in Hamilton till late. I was hungry and very thirsty, not having had a drink since two o'clock. The "lane" was little more than a brown, bare, rectilineal passage, whose sole ornaments were the telegraph poles and wires running exactly down its middle, and the skeletons and carcases of sheep, or of some poor patient bullock who had done something more than his duty. Suddenly the sun dropped from behind the cloud, whose rim had been glowing with an intense brilliancy, and flooded the whole plain with golden light. Then, almost as suddenly, he was gone, and I was riding along in the bronze and rapid darkening of the stealthy evening.

Much riding or driving over the treeless plains afflicts one with a kind of stupor. The stars come out marshalling their array more and more thickly. The strange sounds of the desert by night—the inexplicable breathings and rustlings, the pursuits and captures of the unknown spirits of earth and air, the fantastic figures and shadows of crouching, attentive animals—I have never been able to rid myself of its sombre and weird glamour. There is no animal life, to speak of, in these plains now. The kangaroo, the emu, the dingo, are all gone. The ground-lark and his foe, the hawk, a stray hare, or a quail whizzing away from your approach; these, and the huddling mobs of the wild, timid, yet inquisitive "monkeys" are all that meet you. The great alluvial steppes, with their ground-showers of volcanic pumice-stones, are like a Dead Sea of earth in these latter days of drought and denudation.

The inevitable way these thoughts, with others of a somewhat superstitious character, took hold of me, annoyed me. Even my horse was stirred by something and broke away from that horrible station shuffle of his—that cross betwixt canter and trot which is the consistent gait of heartless hacks and

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Chinese coolies. The monotony of the plains ceases at night. The ground-wind becomes a person and raises its head towards the crowding stars. The carcases and skeletons seem agitated with a fitful breath of being. The dry bones do not veritably live, but they seem to feel once more the electric currents of life thrilling through and through them. Why should the evil odour of dead animal matter be so appalling at night? The ghosts of wistful bullocks, aware of the greed and tyranny of mankind, standing impotently hostile to me as a member of the dominant race, made me laugh, and yet I recognised a certain reality that was disquieting. And all the while hunger and thirst gnawed at stomach and mouth, and the miles to the belt of trees which surrounded the township seemed something more than interminable.

But all things end at last, and, as the "lane" suddenly broke into the line of trees, both horse and rider brightened up, and the stirring strains of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" were (rather inappropriately, it is true) whistled out cheerfully into the dark. Still six or seven miles to go, but already in front of me I could see lights—the lights of some house that was the outpost of kindly civilised men living in community together.

As I came closer I was struck by the number and brilliancy of these lights. Their position enabled me to guess the shape of the house. Not that there is much difficulty in doing that in the bush. We have not got out of the primitive stage yet, when a human habitation is conceived of as a box, divided into four parts, with doors and windows in equally symmetric simplicity. Thus, I readily concluded, when I saw a clear light with two stars of light on the near side of it, that this was an ordinary bush-cottage divided into four parts, with a front veranda; that the further front room (the sitting or dining room) was well lit up, while the nearer front room or nearer back room (probably bed-room) had a candle or lamp in each. The further back room was, of course, out of my

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range. I cannot tell what set me off speculating about the construction of this house, unless it were that I had already made up my mind to stop and ask at it for a drink of water.

At this point, when I was sixty or seventy yards away, I perceived by an added light suddenly appearing between the two first ones that someone had opened the door. Then that someone became apparent to me. I have keen sight, and the circumstances were propitious. I saw in a moment that it was a woman clad in white, with a candle in her hand. The great breadth of the road and my elevated position on horseback gave me an excellent view. I was surprised; then a little startled, but held on, keeping my gaze fixed on her.

She was standing on the veranda—on the edge of the veranda. I was struck by her vague attitude. The light of the candle which she held illumined her face fitfully.

There was not much breeze out in the open plain. Here in the scrub there was little or none. The candle flickered and burned steadily, with an almost regular alternation. What was she about? She seemed heedless of everything. The sound of my horse's hoofs must now have been distinctly audible to her. I crossed the road and came along the fence, all the while keeping my gaze fixed on her.

She held the candle loosely, letting it hang forward. She was in her night-gown, a long night-gown that reached to her feet. Her hair, long and thick, was all about her neck and throat. Her head was sunk back, as it were, into her shoulders, which stooped forward and seemed narrow.

As I drew up at the gate, the candle steadied for a moment, and I saw her face distinctly. The look of her eyes was enough. I concluded at once that she was either walking in her sleep or mad. I sat there and watched her.

She seemed irresolute, now turning a little backwards to her left, now making as if to advance. Her feet were moving uneasily, as if feeling their way forward. The veranda had one step, and it was a big one. Several times

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she felt out and down with her bare foot. Then her mind seemed to be made up. Down she came.

She was now in the path and almost six yards from me, directly facing me. It was a little garden with four beds divided by two cross-paths. The beds had shrubs and flowers in them. She turned off along the cross-paths to my right, and, with her back to me, stooped over the far bed, plucking flowers and leaves with one hand, holding the candle in the other. I sat and watched.

Presently she put the candle down on the path, and went on plucking flowers and leaves with both hands, rather promiscuously, till they were full. Then she stopped and seemed to consider for a moment. I could hear the deep sigh she heaved as she gathered up her night-gown into a lap and put what she had gathered into it. She went all along the first bed, and then, turning along the second, and now, quite regardless of the candle, faced me. I sat and watched.

The second bed done, she passed by the flickering candle and came along the path to the front bed on my right. I could have touched her once or twice, she was so close.

From the third bed she went to the fourth, and then, seemingly satisfied with her gathering, slowly came back into the centre path and went up onto the balcony. I decided to follow her. It appeared to me the best thing to do under the circumstances.

I got down quickly, opened the gate, shut it, tied the bridle to the top, and turned to the house. The sound of my horse moving about seemed to have arrested her attention. She was standing on the veranda with her head thrust forward, listening. In my hurry I almost ran up against her. We were hardly a yard apart.

I felt somewhat embarrassed. Yet it was quite clear that she did not see me. Nevertheless, I averted my eyes, looking aside at the candle guttering on the path.

With a glance at her I stepped to it and took it up. She

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seemed satisfied that there was no one, and, with her slow, peculiar movement, the shoulders bowed and the head sunk back into them, turned and went in by the door. I followed.

It was a narrow passage opening by two doorways into the side rooms and running on by a third door into one of the back rooms. All three doors were open, and light proceeded from each, though faintly from that at the end of the passage. She took the door immediately on the right and entered. I followed.

The first thing that struck me was the fact that there were a number of candles lit in it. They were ranged everywhere. The next thing was a bedstead, a stump bedstead, draped all in white with sheets, and running across the end of the room on the left. Upon the bedstead, covered with a single sheet, was the corpse of an old woman.

The girl was now standing between me and the face of the corpse, but I had caught one glimpse of it and it was ghastly. Utterly bloodless, yellowy-white, with the veins big and blue all over the brow, the sunken eyes half covered with the waxen lids, the tight brown lips drawn back from the long teeth, it was the figurement of incarnate death. I was horrified, but irresistibly attracted. I neither advanced nor retreated. I stood still, candle in hand, and looked and looked.

Then the girl began to speak. At first I could not, or did not, catch the words, but I felt they were a child's wail of pity over some unhappy person or thing.

"Oh, poor thing, poor thing, poor thing!" she said. "Oh, poor thing, poor thing, poor thing!"

She lifted up her face and began to sing. It was one of the songs little children learn to sing in chorus. She sang it absolutely as a child would with just the same tone and regular marking of the time. I only remember two lines of it—

"Buttercups and daisies,
See the pretty flowers!"

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And with that she began sorting out her flowers and leaves to put a nosegay of them on the pillow beside the ghastly face.

I drew closer, until I stood at the foot of the bedstead, and there I watched it all like a man in a miraculous dream.

She did not end talking and singing until she had strewn all the flowers about the face and shoulders of the dead body.

"Robin red-breast, robin red-breast," she said, "he comes to bury the dead people. The poor things, the poor things! Do not forget the dead people. Be kind to the dead people, be kind to the dead people! The poor things, the poor things!"

When she had done, she drew back and, saying several times, "Good-bye, poor thing, good-bye!" slowly turned and went to the door. I gave one parting glance at the nose and teeth thrust up through that confused shower of green and colour, geraniums, white verbenas, petunias, and a miscellaneous collection of leaves, and followed her down the passage and to the door of the second back room, which was in the middle of the partition on the left, and was open, with light proceeding from it. She entered it.

I came to the doorway, putting the candle down on the table that was in the middle of the room, and looked in.

It was a bed-room with a large double bed in it. Two young girls lay in the inside of the bed, fast asleep. A candle was on the chest of drawers at the foot of it.

These two girls did not strike me as being the sisters of the first one. They were dark in hair and complexion, and of a much slighter build. Neither did they resemble one another.

The sleep-walker paused a moment at the edge of the bed and looked round. Then she lifted up the clothes and got into the bed with the others. They moved uneasily, and

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spoke a little in drowsily peevish tones, but in a few moments all three lay there side by side, close up to one another, breathing tranquilly, fast asleep.

What should I do? Was there any one else in the house? It seemed not.

I blew out the candle and went back along the passage, and looked into the room opposite the drawing-room.

A candle burned on a chest of drawers in it, and I could see where the bedstead had been. Otherwise it was empty. I stepped into the veranda, and thought for a few moments. Then I crossed the path, unhooked my bridle, undid the gate, shut it behind me, mounted my horse, and rode away.

That was the adventure I had last month, and you will agree with me that it was a most singular one.

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"AGGY."

THE tale old Ned told me on Christmas Night, as a sort of explanation of his fixed belief that "Murray's Waterhole" was haunted by what can only be described as a regular gang of ghosts, amounted, I suppose, to something like this:

I.

GOING DOWN THE RANGE.

ALL Murray's shy pretexts for loitering were only too obviously exhausted.

Hadwin had fallen into something like a permanent silence, having no more to say on any presently conceivable topic, and, although Murray would have been quite content to sit there without a word and take his opportunities to look at "Aggy" seated sewing on the bench in the sunset, he recognised that he had overdone the thing. Then, too, it was really putting his mate's good nature to a severe test to send him along down the Range with that big mob of horses, and only Billy the black boy to help him keep them together.

Murray had said, "Go on, Jack; I'll catch you up in a minute."

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The minute had grown to almost an hour, and he would have to ride quickly, and at a risk, down the "pinches" to catch them up before they camped for the night at the Convicts' Waterhole.

All of which being borne in upon him now in this the more awkward and protracted of the late series of silences, he rose, remarking:

"Well, I must be off! Good night, Mr. Hadwin, and thanks for your kindness."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Hadwin, rising also.

Murray came to Aggy.

"Good night, Miss Hadwin," he said, holding out his hand.

Once more he had the tremulous delight of meeting the quiet, inscrutable gaze of those wonderful, dark, lustrous, agate eyes, which seemed to look down into all his heart and soul and mind: of contemplating that full oval face with its bronzy ruddy skin covered with a soft, glinting, golden down, under the marvellous shadow of the mass of dark red hair.

There was something demoniac about the girl. The strange sense of peace and power which came from her inspired him with a wild wish to possess this perfect creature. It worked upon him like magic.

"Good-night, Mr. Murray," she said.

He longed but did not dare to press her hand, and he had withdrawn his own before he was aware that she had pressed it.

His horse was standing tied to the fence.

He went straight out to him with his right hand closed, and, undoing the reins with his left, mounted with a quick effort, and rode off.

The slab hut was on the extreme verge of the range, and the track that led into the Convicts' Road went straight down to the right. In twenty yards he was riding deep in the shade. He opened his right hand and rather furtively

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kissed it in the palm. He had not done that after he parted from her the first time, five months ago. When he reached the road he raised his head and looked up. The slab hut stood out in the broad stream of vivid light from across the plain with a sort of looming prominence. Then he felt his heart and breath stop. Somewhat to the left of the hut was a dark figure with its face towards him. It was hers—it was Aggy's!

Here and there in the dense verdure, shafts and glints of light fell through the deeper gullies that cut into the edge of the range. As far as the eye could reach eastward was a billowy sea of murmurous tree-tops, bordered by large horizon-clouds that looked like mountains, their loftiest peaks still radiantly white, their summits roseate, their bases tenderly shadowy. He thought he heard her voice. She was moving in a little open space along the edge of the range. The faint breeze from the west, flowing with the sunlight, carried the sound over his head, when it seemed to fall down and dissipate itself over the billowy sea of murmurous tree-tops.

She was singing. He strained his ears to catch the song, but could not. Only wafts and subtle echoes of her voice came to him. His horse went on shuffling carefully down the loose earth of the second "pinch," as he made a short cut across to the continuation of the timbered road. He paid no heed, but continued gazing up and back at the dark figure moving along the edge of the range. Then suddenly the stream of light was cut off. The sun had set on the far edge of the plain.

She stood still again and looked down, but he heard her voice no more, and then she turned and moved away, and was gone. It was like the swift arrival of death. He felt utterly alone, helpless and hopeless, riding down into the night.

Half an hour later he reached the foot of the range, and presently became aware of a new natural presence. It was

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the moon. She rose slowly and majestically from behind the eastern earth-disc, round, golden in a gilded dustlike conflagration; the heavens all about her, deep, dark, steely blue; not a cloud in all their circling expanse; and one star shining through the gilded dust steadily following her up the sky.

II.

IN THE SLAB HUT.

AUTUMN had passed into winter, dry, clear, and with piercing winds, and then the first breaths of spring swept over the tableland in great waves of warmth, drawing out the young light-green leaves from the old and darker foliage or covering the bare-boughed European fruit-trees with swarms of brilliant buds.

Then came a sudden revulsion. A great wave of cold swept up late one Saturday afternoon, with astonishing rapidity, from the south-west, wheeling on itself and striking this part of the border of the range with an astonishing force. In a few hours the whole temperature was changed. The sun set rayless and impotent in a sky brilliant in colour and yet transfused with a haze that ached the eye to look at it, and everywhere in the small township of Drayton and in the scattered homesteads the women lit the fires and closed the doors.

Aggy had tea by herself. Her father was away in the township, and she did not now expect him till eight or nine, or even later. He had, she thought, stopped with his friends the Johnsons, or else at the Caseys', which was almost half way between Drayton and here. She had washed up the things and was sitting by the slab table close

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to the fire, sewing. The wind was rising quickly, and little draughts, entering through the rudely-constructed and warped window-frame behind her, made the candle flicker and bend down. She was not a neat or rapid sewer, losing herself too much in her thoughts, and in the fitful light she progressed but slowly and unsatisfactorily.

All at once she heard a knock at the door, and, calling out "Come in," it opened, and Tom Moore entered.

Pushing it to behind him and latching it, he stood looking at her and she returned his gaze.

"You didn't expect me to-night, Aggy?" he said, stepping slowly towards her, and taking off his slouch hat.

She let her hands lie on the work in her lap.

"No," she said, "but I am glad you came. Sit down."

He drew a chair beside the fire and sat down on it, bending forward and leaning his elbows on his knees, and turning his head towards her, with a peculiar aggressive side-motion of it and all his body, which she knew well.

The light played on his swelling brows with the two strong furrows that ran down between the big black eyes and the broad straight nose. She had never felt before what a strong element of brutality there was in him.

They kept their eyes attentively fixed on one another.

Then she said:

"I wanted to tell you, Tom, that I have quite made up my mind. That was why I sent the message."

He made no comment.

She waited a moment before proceeding:

"I will not be engaged to you any longer. We must break it off."

He had answered her message by saying he would come over on Sunday morning. It was a week ago that she had asked him to release her, and, after a short outburst of long-suppressed fury, he had left her, and day followed day without his making the least sign. Now an ungovernable impulse had driven him to her, but he found himself unable

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to utter a word. Her deep calm gaze was too much for him.

At last in one of his short breaths he broke out with:

"Why?"

"I have told you."

"You don't love me?"

She shook her head gently.

He rose and stretched out his arms, shivering with nervous strength, tightening his jaws, crushing his teeth in his effort after self-mastery.

"You should give a reason," he said.

"I have given it."

He sat down again, and leant forward in his old attitude.

"Look here!" he said. "Aggy, I courted you over a year before you agreed to be engaged. I've kept company with you two years this midsummer. You know what I've done. By Christmas I'd have the place up and could give you a home. And now you break it off!"

"Tom," she said, "we went through all this that afternoon. I told you how sorry I was. I am *very* sorry. I thought about it all before I spoke to you. It cost me a lot to make up my mind. But I am sure—*quite sure*—that it will be best. I can't marry you. I don't love you. It was a mistake for us to have got engaged. What would it be for us to get married?"

"Why didn't you think so before?"

"I *didn't* think. That was just it. That was what I *ought* to have done, and that is what makes me so sorry—to have given you pain, Tom. I *ought* to have thought."

There was a long silence.

Then he rose, and, staring at her fixedly, said in a low voice:

"I will tell you what it is. It's this: there's somebody else."

She did not turn aside her eyes or flinch, but her cheeks lost their colour.

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"There is!" he went on; "there's somebody else: you love somebody else. You can't deny it."

"I don't," she said.

He almost lost his balance, as if he had been struck full in the face. He clenched his hands and recovered himself.

"Who is it?" he asked hoarsely.

"I will not tell you."

"I'll drag it out of you."

Her eyes gave him the lie.

He swung up both his fists as if to crush her.

She rose slowly. Their faces were not a foot apart. She could feel his breath coming in violent little gusts through his spreading convulsive nostrils.

"Tom," she said, "it is true. That is the way I understood. I did not know what marrying meant. When I began to get in love, I struggled against it. I did all I could; but I could not prevent myself. Then I saw that I could not marry you. Death is nothing to marrying a man you don't love when there is a man you *do* love. Can't you see that, Tom? It would have been dreadful. It could only end in" She did not finish her sentence.

He wheeled round and went with stiff strides to the door, and then turned and came back.

Something had caught her quick ear; she was looking aside.

"Hush," she said. "Here's father!"

In a pause in the surf-like sound of the wind in the trees, and its pressure on the side of the house, they both heard horse-hoofs. There was more than one rider. She went to the door, and opened it a little.

Her father's voice hailed her.

"All right!" he called. "We'll be in in a minute!"

She closed the door and returned to her seat, where she took up her sewing, and began on it again. Moore moved restlessly about, and at last came to a halt beside her. A bench ran along in front of the slab table, and he let himself fall onto it.

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"Will you tell me his name?" he asked, in a low voice, that was gentle and even timid.

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he asked.

"I couldn't. Perhaps he doesn't love me. Perhaps I may never marry him. I know nothing about him. I only know I will never marry anyone else. Let us speak no more about it, Tom, without you will be my friend."

"Your friend?" he echoed, as the door opened.

They both turned.

Hadwin was ushering in some one before him.

"Here's Mr. Murray, Aggy," he said.

Murray entered with his face raised, taking off his slouch hat and coming forward eagerly. He had the look of one of those quiet and silent men who are a standing moral to those who know them for their serenity and self-possession, but who occasionally amaze people by an outbreak of nervous passion almost hysteric in its intensity. The serenity and self-possession still remained with him now, but on his face a wonderful radiance played, transforming even the very lines of the features.

The sum of his toil was complete. He had ridden away from Brisbane, on his road to Drayton, with the consciousness that he could now go to the woman he loved—to this peerless girl with her divine body, and the face and soul of the queen of his dreams—her whom he had met for the first of those three momentous times more than a year ago—and tell her his secret, and, it might be, persuade her to go away with him to the home he could scarcely think of ashers and his.

He walked towards her without seeing anything but her face. Then he was before her and their hands met. The rest was for some time nothing but confusion to them both. It was all like the shifting phases of a dream which one forgets as quickly as one sees it, and cannot recall it afterwards. He felt a dark and troubling element in it—that

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was all—something like the first black outposting cloud of one of the sudden rain-storms that come up in great, dense, inky columns over the edge of the range some cloudless summer afternoon.

Hadwin had had no tea, nor yet had Murray; so Aggy was soon moving about in her quick gliding way, setting the table and putting on the kettle.

Then, as the two men sat down to their meal, Moore, who had been talking with Hadwin, got up to go. The other tried to persuade him to stay, but he was resolute. Aggy was bending over the fire.

Moore came to her, saying:

"Well, good night, Aggie. I'm going."

She turned to him. She was on the far side of the big open fireplace, and he put himself between her and the others, almost screening her off. Their faces were quite close again.

He held out his hand, and she put hers into it.

"Good night," he said aloud, frowning at her, his great brows swelling up in the shadow looking like a threatening thunder-clap. His eyes from the two black depths of their deep sockets glowed as he devoured her with them, seeking to look down into every corner of her soul.

Then he added under his breath, in a low yet, to her, most distinct whisper:

"If you marry that——, I'll throttle you."

Her eyes met his unquailingly. She did not fear him.

He turned, loosening her hand which he had crushed with cruel unconscious brutality, and went to the door, nodding to Hadwin and repeating his good night.

Murray involuntarily followed his movements, and then bent his gaze slowly back to Aggy. She was standing a little forward, full in the firelight. She was looking before her thoughtfully, with an expression of inscrutability that was almost sinister. It frightened him. A flush like faint blood-colour made the bronzy ruddy skin of her face and

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neck and hands, covered with the soft, glinting, golden down, shine and shimmer like a metal. Her dark red hair seemed molten, the shadow of it vaguely illuminated, and the dark lustrous slaty hue of the eyes was glimmered over with pink.

A weird feeling came over her lover as he watched her. She seemed a sort of statue, an idol, standing there raised aloft above a flaming sacrifice where the air was red with fire and the earth red with blood.

"What's the matter?" cried out Hadwin, who was frightened also by a sudden memory of his dead wife erect before the fire in their English home that winter night when the poison took her. "What is it, Aggy?"

She looked up quickly, shaking her head and smiling:

"Nothing, father," she said.

Then turning to the fire she added:

"All right. The kettle's boiling," and lifting it up she stepped with it to the table, the steam rushing from the nozzle, and poured a hissing spout of the water into the open teapot.

III.

THE LOVE NEST.

THE Murrays went back on the Downs a hundred miles, to the humpy in the middle of the selection which Murray had taken up.

He had gone with his brother Andrew more than a month before, and they had put up the hut between them.

Then he and Aggy were married in Drayton, and, getting onto a couple of horses, rode away to their new home.

There were only two rooms in it, divided by a low

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partition, but they were large and lofty, Murray having ideas of his own on the subject of house construction.

Twenty yards off were three waterholes, the last and deepest of which was permanent.

Aggy had quite a craving for water and tall trees.

A creek was her delight, a river her dream.

In flood time she would go out and sit by the creek for hours, watching the water and singing, and, even when it dwindled away to a small stream and at last the merest thread of water, she haunted it each day, loving to lie on her back on some shady part of the bank and watch the tree-tops in the blue, all the leaves bending one way in bunches like tassels in the breeze.

The waterholes by her new home were a pleasure to her at once. They were nicer than any on the top of the range that she knew. They were almost as nice as her two favourites at the bottom of one of the "pinches." There was always the sound of birds there—beautiful pigeons, parrots of all sorts, with scrub and plain turkeys, butcher-birds, magpies, laughing-jackasses, wild ducks, jays, cockatoos (black cockatoos, in the winter, migrating there from the blue Bunya mountains that skirted the north), minas, leatherheads—all her old friends, and some new ones, came there to water in the dry seasons.

Dick, though he did not share her strong attachment to big trees, yet readily let her preserve two or three of them quite close to the house, only remarking that some day one of them would get blown down and crush them to death in their beds.

They were completely happy.

The married lovers who have no quarrels in the adjustment of two personalities in a common life are the darlings of the gods, but this heavenly favour is still, indeed, granted to certain of the sons and daughters of men and women.

Both his nature and hers were eminently gentle, quiet, and reflective.

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They entered the charmed realms of passion with young-eyed faith, and, having plenty of work to do and only the perfect purity of ignorant, healthy intuitions to guide them, escaped satiety and disgust, just as they had escaped disillusionment and dismay.

Their love grew fonder and intenser as the ideal grew into the real, and the real was found to possess so much that had never even been dreamed of.

Alone there in the woods their baby girl was born, and called, at his repeated and urgent plea, by her mother's name of Agnes.

Their nearest neighbour was fourteen miles off, and it was fifty to the Stockman's Friend, the little bush inn on the line of the mail coach into Drayton, where the township of Hamilton was beginning in a few humpies and shops.

Murray and she went there from time to time, or else he by himself, to buy what they wanted, or get what had been left there for him by the coach or some bullock-team coming up from Brisbane.

They were both of them by nature solitary, and had no desire to see anyone else. She helped him in his work, and then her father came to stay with them for some months, and the two men grew to know one another better over their common affections and occupations.

The baby was strong and healthy, though tranquil and apparently thoughtful, and without all that fatness of cheek and vacuous blueness of eye which is supposed to portend the robustness of futurity. Sometimes it was quite like a small edition of the mother—the same look of the eye and catch of the brow, and over the oval, smooth, little skull the red hair showed already like a soft, dark, golden down.

Hadwin prepared to leave them with tender regret. He had once more refused to come and live with them for good, not believing, he said, in the presence of fathers-in-law or mothers-in-law in young homes; and then, he added, they'd nowhere to put him.

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Whereon Murray declared he would add another room in the next month, and again joined with his wife in trying to persuade the old man to come.

He only nodded his head, looking in front of him with the faint humorous smile on his lips and in his eyes.

"Ay, ay," he said. "Some people were too proud to take a home from other people, but must needs make one for theirselves, and now they want the old rat to leave his old hole and fix up in a new one."

It ended in a compromise. The young couple should come and stay with him in a few months when baby was weaned, and then they would talk it over and decide.

Hadwin had to catch the mail coach at Hamilton late in the afternoon, and, as he did not know the country, Murray rode with him, calculating to be back next morning with some things Aggy wanted from the township.

The two men turned back several times to look at her standing leaning at the door in the sunlight, and when they entered the track and Murray turned for his last glimpse of her, he had a deep longing to go back and take her glorious body in his arms and kiss and never leave her. But that was always how he felt. He could not go away from the house to his work of clearing, chopping down and burning the dry and fallen trunks, or gathering them together for the chop-and-block fences, without making quite a little parting of it, constantly looking back for another sight of her, and her appearance on his return was an unfailing pleasure and delight to them both.

Of late, indeed ever since the Murrays had been there, the blacks had been very quiet, attacking or disturbing no one that he heard of, but the first time he had left her alone, when she could no longer ride with him into Hamilton, he had suffered terrible disquietude. Only once had they caught sight of a black, a young gin whom she found one morning at the waterhole, scraping up mud from the bottom to put into a great gash in her shoulder, probably a token of

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her lover's somewhat too demonstrative affection. The girl was frightened and hostile at first, but Aggy had won on her, and at last they came back together to the house and she was given some "damper" and salt meat, standing in the doorway with big, rolling, apprehensive eyes, and refusing to enter.

The sight of the baby, however, lying naked and asleep on the bed, attracted her, and she pointed at it, drawing a pitiful face, and with uncouth words and gestures made the white woman understand that she, too, had had a baby, and that it was dead. Then she went her way, and neither of the other two thought much of her again.

Coming back into the house now, as the two men disappeared down the track, and finding that the baby, impatient of the heat, had kicked off the sheet end, which alone covered it, and lay in its favourite attitude, one little arm flung back round the head and the little bare limbs crossed, she recalled the gin and her pathetic dumb-play, and it saddened her.

Aggy rarely sang about the house. She had the instinct of order and cleanliness in her home, but it was the open air she loved and wherein she was glad. She was always out, lying on the grass under the trees, when she could be there without neglecting her work, and then she would often sing softly to herself by the hour.

All that afternoon she sat under her favourite curra-jong by the waterhole with the baby asleep beside her, sewing a little, reading a little, and thinking and dreaming much.

She never tired of watching the tree-tops in the sunset; seeing the line of shadow steal up higher and higher till one rustling or basking bough was in the light, then only a twig of a few leaves, and then all was dark. That also saddened her; and yet she would always watch it and stay looking and thinking of it afterwards.

It was quite dusk when she rose and picked up the baby

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and her books and sewing, and walked slowly along the track and over the clearing, and through the garden beds into the house. She lit the fire, and went round to the old red ship tank and filled her pail, and the kettle from the pail, and put it on to make the tea. And then it struck her that her other pail was empty—that which held the water for washing. She took it up and set off with it to the waterhole again, some birds that were drinking at it flying off with startled cries as she entered the track.

She thought of this vaguely, wondering at it, going along between the bushes and trees. She bent and dipped and filled her pail, and turned back. A sound—a movement—a rustling beside her caught her attention. She stopped at once and looked round, but, seeing and hearing nothing, passed on again. Just as she was approaching the clearing she thought she heard a step moving behind her.

Once more she stopped.

The next instant there was a rush, and she felt herself seized with two powerful gripping hands by the back of the neck and the throat, and her eyes, starting wildly, looked into eyes that glowered into hers with a ferocious hate.

IV.

THE HUSBAND'S HOME-COMING.

NOTHING in particular had been troubling him, but he had slept badly, and so, when he awoke for the third time, and reflected that his horse was fairly fresh, he resolved to ride on. It was still several hours from dawn. From her post high up in the arch of the skies, however, the moon had already glimpsed the surging sun, and lost her radiancy, wrapped round in a scarf of thin fleecy clouds. The laugh-

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ing jackass, the latest to bed and one of the earliest of the risers, still slept. But the vague restlessness of the approach of light was upon bird and beast, and every now and then there came the indistinct troubled note of one of them still dreaming or drowsy.

It would be a surprise to her to be awakened by him. He would steal in quietly and look at her, lying asleep in the bed in all her perfect health and beauty with the baby cuddled close to her, and wake her with soft kisses—unless she had locked the door!

He always felt tremulous when he thought of her like this. He never could get over the idea that he should some day lose her. He did not look upon her as likely to die. That was not it. Somebody would try to take her from him —to steal her away. He had a great jealousy for her. She was so wonderful—her face, her body, her smile, the very way she spoke and moved. Like a man with an unique jewel, he feared to let anyone see it, dreading that sooner or later fatality would somehow rob him of it.

She was quite different to any other woman, and it seemed that even old Hadwin had noticed the same thing of both her and her mother. Her mother had died in the strangest way in England—poisoned by arsenic a few years after the birth of Aggy. No one had ever found out how the arsenic was given, and Hadwin had not the least suspicion of any particular person. Murray could never think of the horror that came over him as the old man one night told him the story without breaking out again into a cold sweat.

The crepular, hushed, expectant feeling of the hour that precedes the dawn was upon him now as he rode, and he began to get nervous. His fear ended with communicating itself to his horse, who presently shied, and, swerving from side to side, refused to advance. It was one of those groups of grass trees which occur in the scrub, looking like an arboreal family of aborigines, impotently hostile.

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The struggle with his horse, and the coaxing of him up to the trees, acted on Murray like a spiritual tonic. He became warm and even exhilarated, and, as the skies grew rapidly lighter and the notes of the birds rang out into an intermittent chorus, he raised his voice and sang. Then he felt the sun come up. He could not see it yet through the trees on his right, but he knew it had risen from the change from silver into gold of the radiance on the highest tree-tops. In another half-hour he would be at home.

Then he noticed some smoke rising in front of him. At first this did not disturb him, but, when he thought about it, he became anxious and afraid. It was too large for her fire, which, too, she would scarcely have lit yet. Rain had fallen only three days ago; so it was not likely to be a bushfire. He rode on quickly, reassuring himself as he best could, till he struck into one of the home tracks.

The sun was up now, visible by glimpses through the tracery of the boughs, but the scrub was too dense for him to see anything till he broke impetuously into the clearing.

Then in an instant he knew that the hut had vanished. There was nothing there but a gray smoking ruin with one or two black charred uprights. The ground was littered with felled trees, but he dug his heels into his horse and lashed him furiously with the whip, riding over it quite recklessly. The sliprail was open and the fence apparently unbroken, and he swept through and up to the old red ship-tank that had fallen off its supports and lay on its side in a soft bed of dry pasted ashes. His devouring gaze examined it all in the moment in which he flung himself onto the ground.

Nothing! nothing! nothing! All gone!

He strode in among the smoking and smouldering mass, groping with his feet and hands, heedless, unconscious of the burns. Then, with a hoarse gasping cry, he began to stalk round, casting his eyes everywhere for some trace, some sign.

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Nothing! nothing! nothing! All gone! all gone!

Suddenly he caught sight of a footprint on a piece of soft earth at the end of one of the garden beds. It was the mark of a naked foot.

He stood stock still and stared at it. The whole thing was clear. The blacks had rushed the place just before daybreak in their usual way.

And she? and the baby?

He started away again, stalking about as before, vehement, with teeth clenched and glaring eyes, like a savage hound after the trail, breathing such short sharp breaths that they sounded like the noise of a saw driven through dry wood.

Then all at once he found her.

She was lying a few yards up the track that led to the waterhole. She was flat on her back, her arms extended, staring up into the blue and vacuous heavens—dead. The face was distorted, the eyes protrudant, the mouth half open, with a paralysed look, the lips drawn back as if in a desperate effort for breath. The water from the overturned bucket had flowed round her middle, leaving the dark earth darker still. Her dress was torn open at the throat, whose full and marble roundness was wrenched and discoloured. She had been strangled.

He knelt down beside her, utterly without realisation of what had happened. For all the outrage done to it by brutal murderous death, her glorious beauty was still triumphant. The wonderful dark lustrous agate eyes—the full oval face, with its bronzy ruddy skin covered with the soft, glinting, golden down—the marvellous shadow of the massy dark-red hair—the superb forms of her statuesque body—it was still she. Death had robbed her of breath, but, as yet, of no more.

He never thought about the child.

He sat there, holding her head in his lap, gazing into her face, unconscious of everything else.

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It was hours before he knew that she was dead. The sun beat down upon him, and did not yet awaken him to the realities of things.

Then he slowly became a new man. A ruthless insane lust for vengeance possessed and transformed him. He put her head down gently onto the ground, and rose with terrible imprecations, waving his hands, brandishing his arms, and at last howling aloud. He called all men and all things to witness! He cried up to the blazing dazzling sun to shine on and help him in his extermination of this black and accursèd race! Let the rustling trees hear him! They should listen to other gasps and cries beside those they had listened to a few hours ago! The ideas rushed more and more rapidly through his brain, throbbing and beating like great wheel-strokes.

At last, unable to articulate, unable to shake off the mad paralysis of his arms and limbs, he stood there, shrieking with shrill unearthly laughter, exulting in his vision of the curse he would work out.

He never thought about the child. He could only fix his mind on the one idea of vengeance on the man—on the whole race—that had robbed him of his pearl beyond all price, his peerless and unique jewel.

Then all at once he stopped and stood still, listening intently. He thought he heard her voice. It was her spirit calling him. He strained his ears to catch the song, but could not. Only wafts and subtle echoes of her voice came to him.

Then suddenly the stream of light was cut off.

His brain reeled, his sight darkened. He turned round and round, and fell on to his knees, dizzy, bewildered.

With a supreme effort he gathered himself together and reached her, gazing strenuously, though his head twitched convulsively, into her face.

"Aggy," he whispered, "Aggy—speak!"

And then again:

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"Aggy, Aggy—speak!"

But those fixed eyes, with their proud courageous anguish —those tortured lips that had uttered no cry of appeal or fear, could never look or speak to him again.

Circling her head with his hands, as if it were the dearest and most precious thing on earth, he swayed and fell beside her, his cheek falling and resting on her breast.

THE END.

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